


Comrades in Arms

Charles King



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"FOR A LITTLE MINUTE THERE WAS SILENCE"
CHAPTER V, PART 2.

COMRADES IN ARMS

A Tale of Two Hemispheres

BY
GENERAL CHARLES KING

AUTHOR OF "A KNIGHT OF COLUMBIA," "AN APACHE PRIN-
CESS," "A DAUGHTER OF THE SIOUX," "THE
COLONEL'S DAUGHTER," ETC.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

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PART ONE

What Happened in the West

COMRADES IN ARMS

CHAPTER I

“NUMBER THIRTEEN” AND THE MESS.

THE first thing Pat Langham does when he gets a new uniform,” said Captain Sparker reflectively, as he studied the approaching officer, “is to pay the photographer a visit.”

“And the last thing Pat Langham does,” drawled Lieutenant Crabbe significantly, “is to pay the tailor—anything.”

The first speaker was a man of forty—stout, ruddy-faced, and sturdy; a man of substance, thanks to a well-to-do wife. The second was a man of thirty, spare, somewhat angular, and possibly dyspeptic; a man of many moods, few of them gracious. Both speakers were component parts of a little group smoking and chatting lazily on the veranda of the officers’ mess. It was just after luncheon on a June day, and the inspector general was officially visiting the post. The sun was hot, the shade was alluring. Every man was hoping the inspector would not turn out the garrison in full uniform. Every

man was ruefully certain that that was just what the inspector would do.

At that moment, however, the inspector was closeted somewhere with the commanding officer. Luncheon had been over and done with at the colonel's half an hour at least, for the ladies had been out on the piazza scanning the neighbors and fanning themselves just that length of time. There were at the moment three of them in the household of Colonel Mack—his wife, his wife's married sister, Mrs. Cullin, and his niece, Miss Flora Cullin. All three were in evidence, as were the senior major, the adjutant, and one or two "youngsters"—lieutenants being much favored in the observant eyes of the niece. But the post commander and his official guest were not of the party, and the regimental quartermaster, who had lunched with his colonel, declared as he came hurrying along by the messroom that he hadn't even an inkling of what the inspector's plans might be. "He's busy with the Old Man behind closed doors," said the quartermaster irreverently. "Something deep and mysterious, I dare say, for "Old Hardtack" took the colonel aside before we were fairly through lunch. Briggs and I had to choke off," he continued regretfully, for Mr. Potts was fond of the good things of life, and had not too many of his own at home. "Mr. Fleshpots," Crabbe had delicately referred to him

on one occasion, still memorable at the mess. These were the ante-reorganization days, when adjutant and quartermaster were still, as they had been for nearly a century, doing five officers' duty on one officer's pay—when the regimental staff was chosen from the lieutenants, not the captains. Potts, a poor man at best, was wedded to a woman poorer than himself, a woman who bore him many children and complaints, both of which he accepted with Christian fortitude and resignation. A meek man was Potts—in the family circle—but, like many a wedded warrior, what he would submit to at home was no safe criterion of what he might submit to abroad. Crabbe discovered this the oft-remembered night of his unwarrantable witticism. Potts turned on him—it was a mess dinner in honor of a former colonel become a brigadier—with a rejoinder that left its sting to this day. Crabbe was not one of those that hailed him as he came scurrying down the sidewalk. They had exchanged no word since the episode referred to. But Potts was bombarded with questions, for with every other man of the party he was a pet. They had a way of saying that Potts was "square from the ground up," and "without a mean streak in his build," and when men speak thus of their quartermaster he is an official of exalted virtue.

But Potts couldn't stop. He was in a hurry. "Ask Briggs," was his hasty answer, "I'm blessed if I know. Got to send ambulance over to meet the Flyer." Then, carrying the tail of his remarks clear across the roadway, with his mustache bristling over the right shoulder, he wound up with, "Or ask Langham—he was called into the confab."

It was this parting shot that drew all eyes on the designated officer. It was his spick and span, immaculate garb, coupled with the fact that there were four different photographs of the one subject, that called forth the comment of Captain Sparker. It was Madame Rumor that reinforced the ill-natured fling of his brother officer, Mr. Crabbe. In some way or other, every man present had recently heard something to the same effect. At all events no one verbally rebuked the epigram. Some few rewarded it with a chuckle. One officer, however, turned; looked squarely at the speaker a second or two; thought better of an impulse to speak; arose; stepped back into the darkened hallway; took his forage-cap from a peg; went through the reading room to the side veranda, and from the Venetian window on that front, gazed thoughtfully at the approaching comrade.

He merited a second glance, this new-comer, and generally got it, from men, and more than a second from

many women. He was tall, straight, and slender, sinewy, finely built, and favored, moreover, with a well-shaped head and singularly handsome, soldierly face. He was fair of skin and hair, yet dark-eyed. His nose and chin were of the Grecian type, his mouth finely chiseled, and shaded by a sweeping, blonde mustache. He was dressed with exceeding care in the nattiest of fatigue uniforms. His cap, sack-coat, and trousers were new and of most approved cut and finish. The glistening eagle, cord, shoulder-straps, and regimental badge were of fine gold wire, deftly embroidered. The block letters, U. S., on the black mohair braiding of the collar were, as someone had ascertained, and advertised, of solid gold, yet in shape and size closely followed the regulations. This could not be said that year of the coat collar itself, which was very high and stiff and straight—very Prussian and military in effect; very becoming, too, with the narrow bordering line of gleaming white. The cap visor, also, dodged the unbecoming slope of the regulation of the day and curved closely down over the handsome dark eyes. The snowy stripe of the trousers was fully half an inch wider than authorized. The coat was cut with very square-shouldered effect; very snug, too, at the waist and back and hips, yet the flat braided edges lay trimly together from the throat to the squared cor-

ners at the bottom, innocent of the unsightly, gaping effect so noticeable in so many specimens of that most indefensible garment. Just as much of white cuff as of white collar was visible. Just as snug-fitting and spotless were the white, wash-leather gloves. Just as immaculate and shapely were the natty boots. Take him all in all, Mr. Langham was as presentable a soldier as the regiment had ever seen. Yet there was many a man in the regiment who did not seem to like him. There were one or two whose dislike bordered close on hate.

Perhaps it was his serene indifference to either dislike or hate, to comment or criticism, that made Mr. Langham so distinctly a mark for the slings and arrows of his detractors. They could have found it possible, perhaps, to forgive his superiority in dress, bearing, and general appearance. What they could not forgive was that he should rise superior to every effort thus far made to "take him down." He was twenty-seven, well-born, well-bred, well-educated, well-favored. He rode, danced, and "tennised" finely. He drilled, shot, and studied fairly. He never meddled with other men's business, and he resented their meddling with his. He never was uncivil, even to those who would be, and had been, uncivil to him, but his civility was of a sort that rasped them more than overt affront—it savored so much of utter indifference. He

never spoke a woman's name except in respect, and never at all when only men were present. He was genial and courteous to men whom he liked, but such men seemed few. He had hardly a flaw in his physical make-up, and as to moral obliquities, no man in the regiment could hazard a sustainable criticism. He had entered service from civil life five years earlier. He had been known to this regiment only five months—promoted from one where most men were friends, to one where all men were strangers. Not one of the twenty who called to bid him welcome within the week of his arrival had he ever seen before. A limited few he had heard of—cared little to see again.

He came from a command long stationed in the East, to one that had never seen anything but the West—much of the time a wild West, indeed. He played a fair hand at whist, and no hand at poker. He seemed to like Bordeaux, but couldn't bear Bourbon. It was never on tap at his quarters. He cared little for billiards, and less for pool. He joined the officers' mess the day after his coming, and was absent from dinner almost every evening of the fortnight that followed. It added not to his popularity among the bachelors that he was so welcomed of the Benedicks. These latter were not to blame: their wives enjoyed the talk of a man well versed in society's

ways, who was fresh from the far East, and could be drawn out as to metropolitan doings, dances, dinners, and the like. He looked well in the conventional black and white of evening garb, and was doubtless surprised to find that so few of his new brethren ever wore it. They dined and danced in uniform, as we had for years on the frontier, even after a merciful war secretary ordained that for purely social affairs civilian evening dress might be forgiven. He was properly attentive to all the married women, from the colonel's wife to the bride of Second Lieutenant Callow, only just joined. He was not too attentive to any one of the few maidens, and thereby piqued the curiosity and interest of nearly all. He spent some time in fitting up his quarters, he or his servant doing all the curtain draping, picture hanging, carpet laying, rug beating, etc., etc., despite a hint or two from a woman or two that in that sort of thing the touch of a feminine hand, the taste of a feminine eye, was ever essential to happy results. The men were speedily telling tales about Langham's luxurious ways. "Silk bedspreads, begad!" said Cross disdainfully, "and tissue paper petticoats on the lamps, camel's hair shawls on the floor—well, if it wasn't camel's hair what was it?" This to his wife. "Embroidered sofa-pillows, embroidered pillow-shams; yes, more jimcracks and tomfoolery than

most any women I ever knew. Why, when I was a youngster the best we had was a hospital cot and horse blankets."

Langham raised a storm, however, when to his other iniquities he added four o'clock tea, and smilingly invited his various hostesses of that initial fortnight to drop in and partake. They had all heard by that time of his expensively furnished quarters, and many women were eager to see and judge for themselves. Then it transpired that Fox, the English servant he had brought with him, was an adept in the gentle art of brewing tea, that Mr. Langham's tea service was both pretty and costly, that he had photograph albums filled with pictures of very modish-looking people, one of them being given up to professionals of the stage, many of whom had scrawled their autographs across the polished surfaces. These were mines of interest for maids and matrons both, these exiles of the far frontier, and for these four months after his coming no garrison function called forth so many of the one sex and so few of the other as Langham's Sunday afternoons. It was an innovation his brother officers, bar half a dozen, declared they "couldn't stand for."

But that wasn't all. There were six companies of infantry and four of cavalry that spring at the post. The officers often rode out with the hounds, the girls with the

officers. With the exception of the few that owned their own mounts, they all used troop horses. The men, to a man, and to the best of their powers, rode the army seat in the army saddle, either McClellan, Whitman, or Wint. Langham came early in February, his household belongings early in March, his horses, two, early in April, and with them sensation, indeed. They were beautiful bays, with black points and banded tails—blooded, mettlesome creatures, as every trooper could see before ever they were stripped. They were stalled in the little shed stable in rear of his quarters. He never so much as hinted that he would be glad to obtain government forage—that might have opened a chance for a snub; it was hauled out from town, a big load—oats, bran, and hay, that must have cost him a month's stipend. But the climax came when, after the two had been limbered and exercised, groomed till they glistened—another function in which Fox excelled—the dancing, delighted pair were brought round to the front of the quarters one bright Saturday morning, equipped with Melton bridles and English hunting saddles, with every bit, buckle, and chain gleaming with polish, and Mr. Langham stepped forth in a civilian riding suit, whipcord breeches and pig-skin leggins and riding crop of the most approved pattern, but something utterly strange to nine out ten denizens of

Fort Minneconjou. "Good Lord, look at them pants!" exclaimed one old-timer, disdain and amaze commingling in his tone. Even the conservatives could see nothing to approve of in those bulging, baggy, shapeless togs, tight cut at the knee, for this was '97. Foreign fashions had not then reached the far frontier. The old-school trooper gazed in disgust at the *haute école* outfit and swore that if only a white man—by which he meant a cavalryman—were in command of the post no such absurd exhibit of monkeyshines would be permitted. The fact that Colonel Mack should nod approval as the lieutenant trotted away, "actually jiggering up and down," rising in his stirrups, was past comprehension and much past patience. That was bad enough as a starter; but, when challenged and even dared to come out and ride "cross country" all cut up with irrigating ditches and prairie dog holes, Langham calmly accepted, his fine bay guiding by a mere touch of the rein, taking the leaps in his stride, trailing close after the hounds every rod of a six-mile chase, and trailing after him nine-tenths of the field. That night there was well-nigh a mob at the mess, and Major Baker, of the cavalry, presiding officer thereof, left his chair and the premises. The youngsters were planning some devilment, some scheme to "take Langham down," and Baker would neither countenance nor condemn it. Langham,

dining at the doctor's, heard naught of the plan until nearly eleven. He had been playing whist. He was in evening dress, civilian throughout, and under the lamp-post nearest his quarters he met one of the few men to whom as yet he had taken a fancy—Jim Gridley, a subaltern of cavalry, some years his senior, and Gridley proposed their having a pipe in his rooms. There he quietly suggested that Langham change to uniform if he intended going to the mess before turning in. Langham asked why. Gridley answered that, while the colonel had ruled in Langham's favor that civilian evening dress could be worn at social functions such as a dance or a dinner, it would be unwise to take undue advantage and go elsewhere, even to the mess, except in uniform. "You take too many chances, as it is," said he as quietly.

"You mean I would be taking other chances if I went there, *now*," said Langham, with a downward glance at his broad shirtfront and dainty pearl studs. Gridley gave no answer. "Let's go, then," said Langham.

"Not as you are," said Gridley, and the elder man and stronger will prevailed.

But it chafed and nettled Langham. He knew there was a feeling against him among the dozen that made up the mess. "Baker's dozen" they named it after Langham's joining had made it thirteen. In part, he was told,

it was due to the old superstition against the number and the possibility of having to sit thirteen at table. In the main, he was sure, it was caused by a certain narrowness and provincialism in the mess, due to its long existence beyond the pale of civilization and the light of social amenities as practiced in the far East. That it would have been wiser on his part to adapt himself, rather, to their ways, and only gradually to introduce those that obtained in his former regiment, had occurred to him only to be rejected. Langham had the courage of his convictions. What he was doing was right; therefore would it be wrong not to do it. Might it not be more politic? was asked. Doubtless; but Langham could never have succeeded as a politician. These were matters he had talked over with Gridley before—that they talked of earnestly that April night, and had never since discussed at all. Gridley found it useless, and so refrained.

It was about this time the mess began to refer to Number Thirteen as “Pat”—as incongruous a forename as could well have been combined with his strictly Saxon patronymic. Only son of an English mother who had early met, loved, and married a gifted secretary of the American legation, he had been named for the father, and that father for England’s famous young statesman of an earlier day and generation. As “William Pitt

Berkely Langham" the youngster was registered in school days at Eton. "Mr. William Pitt Langham" he later appeared on the rolls of Yale—the Berkely would not have been elided had he gone to Harvard—and then the sire was taken from earth, and the youth reverted to the dominion of a fond, doting, and unwise mother, who, when he chose the army for his career and old and influential friends of his father obtained his commission, had his first cards duly engraved at Tiffany's:

Mr. Wm. Pitt Berkely Langham
—th Regiment of Infantry
U. S. Army

This card went with him to Sackett's Harbor, where it was speedily laughed out of barracks. He ordered his own before he was shifted to Buffalo, finding his father's wisdom unimpeachable, and did modestly well in society as Mr. William P. Langham. But a winter in Washington, close to the throne and the embassies, plunged him again into polynomials, and, at his mother's instance, a new plate was prepared: "Mr. Wm. Pitt Berkely-Langham," this one read, and was her entire joy. She sounded the most courteous of adjutants-general upon the propriety of having her boy so gazetted in the annual official register, and was surprised to hear that it could be done

only through Act of Congress. "Pitt," as he had been dubbed at school, came out to the frontier with cards on the Buffalo plan, which passed current everywhere, and all might have gone well but for the mother's fatal propensity for enlightening the community as to her boy's aristocratic lineage. She *would* address her letters in her own way. He heard, of course, as people in garri-son are apt to hear of fun at their expense, that men and women both were saying satirical things, but he gave no sign. One day, however, a telegram in its brown envelope came to the mess, the Hibernian messenger, Bugler Brannigan, inquiring innocently for "Lootn't Pat Langham," and the mess went wild. Major Baker, as in duty bound, would have rebuked the youngster, but Crabbe had seized the envelope and, with a shriek of delight, proclaimed Brannigan guiltless. The fault lay with the telegraph people. The stigma went from the bugler to the operator, but the name stuck to the victim.

Sparker's aspersion, recorded in the first paragraph hereof, had some foundation in fact. Four photographs of Mr. Langham had been taken in as many years, the last one at the flourishing frontier city of Silver Hill, close at hand. That three of the four, including the last, were taken at the mother's behest, no one at Fort Minneconjou had been told. They drew their own conclusions,

which, as a rule, were not weighty, and Langham let them. From the time of his coming until on or about the 15th of May that gentleman had seemed impervious to either satire or criticism. Then on a sudden there had come a change from the attitude of calm superiority. "Pat" Langham, from being the most imperturbable swell at the post, became, within a few days and two letters, a sad, harassed, and obviously anxious man. Then many letters began to come, letters that bore no seal, no crest, no scrawling superscription—business letters, lawyers' letters, tradesmen's letters, alas, in strange preponderance. Then the adjutant's office developed a leak. It wasn't Briggs, the close-mouthed, loyal adjutant. He was furious when he heard of it. But it was some one of Briggs's clerks. A well-known firm of tailors had sent to the adjutant-general a bill of some \$500 against Mr. Langham. Another firm had contributed a second, less in size but equal in age. Both declared that Mr. Langham declined to notice their appeals, and, therefore, they demanded action. The matter had been referred through intermediate headquarters to Colonel Mack, who in turn referred it to Lieutenant Langham, temporarily his own company commander, and the reply of that officer was something beyond the powers of Crabbe and his cronies to ascertain. Two things, however, became appar-

ent at once—one was that Langham, who had been looking careworn and anxious, “braced up” unaccountably. “Treats me with *hauteur* and acts more like a lord than ever,” snarled Crabbe. “Why, if I’d had such a complaint to answer I’d want to hide my head somewhere.”

“Try your stein, Crabbe,” smoothly suggested Gridley, “it’s big enough.” It had become unsafe to sneer at Langham when Gridley was by, and the mess got to know it; but what puzzled the mess more than a little was the second thing that had become so suddenly apparent. Lieutenant and Adjutant Briggs, one of the elders of the subaltern element, a poor man financially, but a treasure to his post commander, began to “cultivate” Langham, and Crabbe watched the symptoms with astonishment that was mingled with alarm. Briggs must soon reach his captaincy and, whether he did or no, must surely lose the adjutancy, for the law of the day limited him to four years. Crabbe knew the colonel was already casting about for his successor, loath as he was to part with him. Crabbe long had had his eye on the adjutancy, and up to the time of Langham’s coming his hopes had been high. It was incredible, he now said, that the Old Man would pick out for the place a junior first lieutenant, when he could have the choice of several seniors of experience;

but his heart failed him, even as he spoke—Mack had shown such partiality for Langham. There was another who looked on Langham with similar jealousy, but not such virulent hate. One was enough for the purpose, however. Crabbe heard of Langham's misfortune with joy like that of Shylock over Tubal's tidings and the wreck of Antonio's galleons, but joy turned to doubt, and triumph to hate, when he saw that, so far from breaking, Langham stood warmer with the colonel and the colonel's staff, and this was the situation on this bright June day when Sparker and Crabbe were launching their shafts at the unconscious head of the coming man.

Reaching the broad plank-way in front of the mess, Mr. Langham turned to his right and came straight up the steps. That awkward silence had fallen on the group that tells the observant latest arrival that he or she has been the subject of unfriendly remark. Women dissemble better under such circumstances, if not under all. Some of the youngsters made way for him. None of the elders stirred.

"Any news, Langham?" queried Palmer, seeking relief and information in one breath.

"Lots," was the laconic reply, and Langham was looking straight at Crabbe as he ascended the steps.

"What—for a starter?" asked Palmer, because he saw

he was expected to ask, even though good judgment counseled silence.

"For a starter?" repeated Langham deliberately. "Why, for a starter, it seems we've started the Minneconjou School for Scandal, with Crabbe as Grand Gabbler."

Crabbe turned white as he squirmed out of his chair and faced his accuser, whose fingers were twitching eagerly. "I'll trouble you to explain that, Mr. Langham," he began.

But by this time other men were on their feet. Gridley was coming swiftly round the corner. Sparker, senior officer present, was heaving slowly up from the settee. It was high time for him to interpose. Langham and Crabbe, each white with wrath, the one cool, resolute, and ready; the other quivering, raging, yet not unprepared, were confronting each other not four paces apart.

"Gentlemen, this must stop! Not another word!" said Sparker, striding between them.

"If you say that of me," burst in Crabbe, over Sparker's shoulder, "you're a liar!"

"He does say it of you, and he doesn't lie," responded another voice—Gridley's, in cool, measured tone. "Come with me, Langham; you know it means arrest if you stay here." Then he whirled about and confronted the astounded group. "My friend spoke the truth, Captain

Sparky, and you know it, and I'm with him if Mr. Crabbe has anything further to say."

Down the line came the peal of the bugle, the summons to duty—whatever it might be.

"I'll see you to-night when this—this business is over," screamed Crabbe, after the departing pair. But Langham, very straight, never turned to look back or answer. Gridley was swiftly marching him away.

"By gad, it's inspection in full uniform! See, there goes the orderly!" cried Palmer. "No time for other foolishness."

"But I'll make him eat his words to-night," raved Crabbe, his voice now hot with passion. "Both of them for that matter."

Most men, however, were silent as they hurried to their quarters. They knew Langham's justification. They doubted his being made to "eat" a word. They vaguely dreaded the outcome, and they had reason.

But no man dreamed of such tragic sequel as was to startle all Fort Minneconjou within the compass of the coming night.

CHAPTER II

THE SHOTS AT MIDNIGHT.

THERE was a dance that evening at the post. They always had one when an inspector came. They liked to show him they could drill, parade, march, maneuver all the livelong day, if need be, then waltz or polka, or even poker, all night. The *élite* of Silver Hill drove out to take part, some of the best-known coming earlier to dine. The big assembly room was always in readiness for garrison society, and society in readiness for such gayeties, the band and certain elders among the family men being the only growlers. This time the colonel intimated toward evening to Mr. Briggs that, it being in honor of the inspector general, the dance should be regarded strictly as a military function, and it might be well to suggest that full uniform should be worn. The only man in the least likely to think of wearing anything else being Mr. Langham, Briggs dropped in at Langham's on his way home to dinner, and found Fox brushing and stowing away his master's parade uniform. The lieutenant himself was not in sight. "Gone out to see the 'osses, sir," said Fox, his smug, clean-shaven face inscrut-

able as ever. That man of Langham's was a living menace to the peace of mind of many people at the post. A soldier "striker" in bygone days had been the nearest approach to a body servant ever seen in the regiment. An English combination of valet and groom was something almost unheard of on the frontier. Fox slept under his master's roof, ate with the steward at the officers' mess, and lived under his officer's protection, else might living have at first been impossible in the land where every man, not soldier-bred, was fiercely insistent on the theory that he was as good as any other—if not vastly better. A position of voluntary servitude no westerner could condone. Even the rank and file revolted at sight of Fox. Hibernian men-at-arms had a drubbing in mind for him before he had been a day at the fort, but dropped all thought of it within the month. Fox volunteered his services at the garrison "show," and proved to be a low comedian and ventriloquist of amazing powers. He leaped in a single hour to the height of popularity. Who could ever think of slugging a man who made mirth for everybody.

Off the stage, however, Fox maintained an air of professional gravity and decorum absolutely unimpeachable. His 'osses and his 'ouse, it would seem, demanded all his care and attention. His eyes were blind, his ears deaf to the allurements of kitchen doors along "the row" and

the married quarters under the bluff. More than one maid had ogled and simpered in vain. It was whispered that Fox was already blessed, or burdened, with a wife and children in the East, or somewhere, but no one knew. He was a mite of a man, barely five feet two, and spare in proportion. He had been a jockey perhaps, a stable boy surely. What people could not understand was how it happened that one so gifted as Fox should serve in so humble a station.

“That feller could get his hundred a month easy, and I offered him that,” said the manager of the Alhambra Music Hall and Theater in town. But when Fox was told of this munificent bid, he so far relaxed from his habitual attitude of professional stolidity as to uplift both brows, wink with one eye, and pronounce it all gammon. The wiles and blandishments lavished on Fox at the few entertainments he had been persuaded to attend might have turned many a head, but thus far had been powerless to draw from him aught of his past. Master and man, each in his sphere, Langham and Fox were objects of more interest, curiosity, and speculation than all the official inquisitors that ever disturbed the garrison.

Now, Briggs did not wish to convey an official hint through a domestic channel. It would have been easy to say to the man, as he saw Langham's evening dress laid

out in the back room, that full uniform was the rule for the night, but he preferred to say it to the master. "I wish to speak to the lieutenant," said he, and started to go through to the kitchen, such being the free and easy way of the frontier, but Fox was first. "I'll call Mr. Langham, sir," said he, as he dropped his brushes and darted ahead. So the adjutant waited. Thinking of it later on, it occurred to him that he waited a good while for a man who had less than a dozen rods to cover. Langham was a long time coming; apologized for the delay, but did not explain it. He was sorry that Briggs had burdened himself with so unnecessary a hint. "I should have worn my war paint," said he, "but didn't think to tell my man. Er—er, won't you sit a while?" But Briggs said no, he must hurry on, and so left him, and then, half way to his own quarters, bethought him of another matter, turned suddenly back, and bolted in, for the door still stood invitingly open.

"Langham," he cheerily called, "you may have to take Gridley's guard tour to-morrow. Grid's going to——"

But Langham wasn't there. Neither was Fox. This time the adjutant pushed on through the bedroom to the dens in rear. He thought to find his comrade at the stable. He stumbled on him on the back porch. Master

and man both were there, so busily occupied that neither had heard his call nor heeded his coming. Both were bending over a chest in the endeavor to lift out a tray that had warped or jammed. Some of the contents had been removed, as two cases of japanned tin, called by our English cousins "dispatch boxes," stood on the boarding close by Langham's foot. Two revolvers of handsome finish lay upon a chair. Some items of hunting garb were tossed upon a bench. Between the busy workers and possible observers along the back porches hung a canvas screen at the west end, and some India matting at the other. Fox, tugging and breathing hard, was flushed with his exertions. Langham, flushed possibly with impatience, was saying something that savored of rebuke and displeasure. Briggs caught, as he issued from the door, just these words:

"Knowing what you do, then, you should have got everything ready at once. I may start—any moment."

Start at this very moment at the sound of the adjutant's soldierly voice, he certainly did. Briggs was quite disconcerted at the effect of his sudden coming. All he said was, "Aw, Langham, be ready for guard in case Grid—why, what's the matter?" and, this being said in the vernacular of the service and most matter-of-fact tone, there was nothing to cause or warrant agitation, yet the tray

slipped from Fox's hand; Fox slapped down the lid, and then, recognizing the speaker and recovering his wits, quickly raised it, mumbling, "Beg pardon, sir. Did I 'urt you, sir?" for Langham, with a half-startled exclamation and a stern "Look out, man!" straightened to his full height and stood almost glaring at Briggs. For a second or two it seemed as though suddenly petrified. Fox was the first to regain composure. He turned on his master, all solicitude. "I am 'fraid I 'urt your 'and, sir. May I look, sir?" And that brought Langham to himself.

"You really startled me, Briggs," he said, with surprising candor. "We've had an eruption to-day—you'll hear of it to-morrow—and I'm all nerves just now. Guard, did you say? All right."

Then, having neither bid nor excuse to tarry, Briggs turned and left. There was something about the whole affair that gave him concern. In common with the rest of the regiment, he had found it hard at first to get acquainted with Langham. In common with none in the regiment, that he knew of, save the colonel, he had been taken to a certain extent into his confidence, and had begun to respect his character quite as much as he had admired his style. Briggs was a safe-deposit box of regimental secrets and skeletons, a deposit box to which even Mrs. Briggs held no duplicate key, and thereby hung a

terrible tale. Briggs never told it. "He never tells me anything," was the lady's plaint to her every intimate, and by turns, or by twos or fours, that is what they all were—these other women. To keep one's place as regimental adjutant one must keep his counsel. Possibly it was because Briggs had early found that Mrs. Briggs told everything, that now he told her nothing. Certain it was that to no one but his colonel would he talk unreservedly of office matters. Many and devious were the good lady's devices to extract information; sometimes merely suggestive, such as, "I hear Captain Forbes got another wiggling this morning;" sometimes flatly assertive, such as, "So 'K' Company has to go to Custer. Then the Blunts will get Carter's quarters;" sometimes reproachfully pleading, "Everyone *knows* Mr. Gridley didn't get back until reveille, and that you covered it somehow, yet you hide it from me." They were all matters, he would say, the adjutant's wife should know nothing about, but her creed was the contrary. There were no matters she should not know about. Briggs's domestic lot was not a happy one, nor was hers. Briggs took to stopping at the mess on stormy nights, and having a social game and a glass, for Mrs. Briggs was rarely alone, and less rarely lonely. Yet she hated to have him away, because it looked as though he "had no use for home" or

for her. Finding that he suspected her motives in catechising him as to his movements, she resorted to the indirect—a pet device with many a spouse—and this, too, he speedily sounded and set at naught. It was “more than many a saint would stand,” was her declaration, both to him and to her successive confidants, for Mrs. Briggs in matters of feminine intimacy blew hot and cold, being one day all impulsive gush, the next day barely on speaking terms.

But while she learned nothing from him as to what might be going on within the charmed circle of regimental life, there is no question that he learned not a little from her. Mrs. Briggs was all over the fort nearly every day of her life, and whatsoever was astir in the air she was almost sure to absorb, and equally sure to disseminate. As a circulating medium Mrs. Briggs outclassed the national currency. Briggs had not been home five minutes when she came flying in from the next door neighbor's and began on the threshold with:

“Well, I suppose you'll tell me there hasn't been a fearful scrap between Crabbe and Langham, and they are going to meet to-night?”

Briggs only tolerated slang in men; he loathed it in women, and his hand went up at once in protest, even as he turned his head away. Yet what she told him tallied

with what he had heard, and it explained in part the obvious excitement and discomposure shown by Langham at his sudden coming. He wouldn't discuss the matter with his wife. He couldn't dismiss it from his thoughts. He had to hasten back to his desk, he said, the moment dinner was over, and did so. "Old Hardtack" wished certain papers and returns to be in readiness for him first thing in the morning, and the clerks were at work on them now. Briggs promised to be home to dress for the dance by 9.30, but he meant to know the truth about the Crabbe-Langham imbroglio before that.

The colonel and his guests were still at table. Briggs could tell that from the brilliant light in the dining room and the sounds of chat and laughter floating out through the wide open windows. The colonel was seizing the opportunity of paying some social debts in town and pleasing "Hardtack" at the same time. There were old friends of the latter among the families of Silver Hill, and to these a dinner at the colonel's was a rare treat. The band, despite the fact that it had to play for review, inspection, and parade during a long afternoon, and that half its membership would have to play for the hop to-night, was at the colonel's doorway discoursing sweeter harmonies than dwelt at the moment in the individual breasts. ("The colonel loves music with his meals," said the colonel's

buxom helpmate, to the mine-owning magnate seated on her left.) Briggs felt morally certain some of those bandsmen would be in a state of revolt, or inebriety, by the time they were wanted for the dance, and thanked his stars it was a matter the colonel and the hop committee would have to settle, not he. The local laws prohibited the sale of intoxicants even in diluted form, but such things as "Kansas canes," "Nebraska hand brooms," etc., were to be had in many a shop in Silver Hill—items that were hollow shams when emptied, as it was found that each cane, when first tapped, contained perhaps a pint of burning fluid, and each whisk was but a receptacle for whisky. Then, what couldn't be bought in one way could be "found" in another. Drug stores, appropriately so-called, were dispensers of spirits "for medicinal purposes" to such citizens as would certify that their physician prescribed and their malady demanded stimulant. The system resulted in prohibition to the reliable citizen and plenary indulgence to the worthless. The neighborhood of the fort had been cleared of the old-time "hog-ranches" by the introduction of the "canteen," where soldiers could be served with sound beer, and so saved from evil. The "toughs" from town, toughs of both sexes that used to haunt those fort-fringing hells, had disappeared with the ranches. An era of "temperance,

soberness, and chastity " had dawned upon the garrison with the advent of the post exchange, and even the moral nature of Silver Hill had soared to unaccustomed heights with the hegira of the harpies. The interminable shooting and stabbing affrays that diversified the rolling years had become almost obsolete. Desertions, once so frequent, were now uncommon. The guard-house prison, once so thronged at pay-day, knew hardly an occupant as a result of a spree. The coroner who used to count on Minneconjou as a fruitful source of revenue, had lost faith in it as a business proposition; and the newspaper men of the bustling mining metropolis, six miles away, had learned to look not upon the fort as longer " red." There hadn't been a ghost of a sensation there for six months, and Silver Hill, unlike Chicago, had tired of paying cash to read what wasn't true.

Briggs was thinking of all this and thanking Heaven he was not a bandsman this close June evening, and wondering what he could do to stifle anticipated complaint as he tripped on briskly past the colonel's and took his way to the office. The day had been long, hot, and trying. The sun had hardly yet said good-night to the valley, though the fort lay deep-nestled in the shadows of the Sagamore Range, and only the crests of the far-away heights to the east still blushed at his parting caress. Briggs thought

whimsically, as the gleam caught his eye, of another complaint against Langham—his imported fashion of bestowing gratuity on servants and “strikers.” The colonel had told Briggs he would better give Langham a hint, the colonel being one of those easy-going mortals who preferred to bestow reproof vicariously. Briggs, just about sunset, only six weeks earlier, had conveyed his colonel’s views to Langham, and Langham smiled and said it was the example of the sun, a remark which called for further explanation.

“Look at those heights,” said he, “every one of them tipped with gold.” Briggs told Mrs. Mack of this *jeu d’esprit* on the part of their recent acquisition. She was of that honest and kindly and numerous class so puzzling to our transatlantic visitors—people who describe each other as most hospitable, as though the charming quality were something by way of an expectorant—and good Mrs. Mack, not quite seeing the point, yet striving to be appreciative, passed it on delightedly next day, as nearly as she could recall it, to her crony, the chaplain’s wife, who naturally saw nothing either witty or apposite in Langham’s having said the eastern horizon was trimmed with gilt. Nor could Mrs. Mack explain it. She only knew, she said, that as Mr. Briggs told it there seemed something real funny about the thing. Perhaps, after all,

she concluded, it was something "dooble ontong," and that she despised. So the *mot* got no more notice than it deserved.

"But, talking of tips," mused Briggs, meeting Langham's own man at the minute, just at the office door, "that man is tipsy." Never before had Fox shown sign of inebriety, at least at Minneconjou. Langham usually left his sideboard keys with his groom, coupled with instruction to see that comrade officers visiting in the lieutenant's absence were invited to enter, rest, and have a peg, a beer, or a weed, as the mood possessed the caller. Fox had been discretion itself and all fidelity as to his employer's instructions, to the end that certain officers were more frequent callers when Langham was out than when he was in, for Langham discriminated, which Fox did not. Fox had appeared all straight at 6.30 P. M., but now it was going on eight. He had had ample time to get his master into evening dress for the doctor's dinner; then, if so minded, to help himself to surplus Scotch and soda. He had been over-tasked during the afternoon. The resort to stimulant was not unnatural. Briggs noted the glassy eye, the droop about the corners of the shaven lips, and the hurried fumble at the hat brim as he touched it in darting by, and Briggs had by no means forgotten it when the summons came some hours later. It seems that

what took Fox to the adjutant's office at this late hour was a note.

DEAR BRIGGS [it said]: I find I *have* to meet the westbound express in town to-night. She was reported two hours late at the Niobrara. I have to hurry to dinner at Dr. Warren's and dislike to call at the colonel's with my request, knowing how many guests he has. May I ask you to arrange it for me. I regret that it will probably prevent my attending the hop. Yours,
LANGHAM.

It must indeed be an important matter that could take Langham away from a dance, mused Briggs. Especially, and now he was saying to himself what he wouldn't breathe to any other soul—especially one that brought the townspeople and pretty Mrs. Bullard with them. Mrs. Bullard was a most winsome and attractive woman, a beauty in the eyes of Minneconjous-male; one who loved to ride, dance, tennis, walk, talk, and none of these could her husband essay. He owned the Baltimore and the Crescent Queen, two of the richest mines on the range. He thought he owned Mrs. Bullard, nearly twenty years his junior, a New-York-made matron, who sang rejoicefully and spoke three languages, only one of which Bullard could understand. The gossips, town and garrison, had begun at her in March, and were buzzing hard in May, for no sooner were the snows swept from the valley than she appeared in saddle and a habit never

made west of the Hudson. She had not ridden to hounds, at least, the previous year. She did not fancy, it now transpired, the local "mounts"; but late in April it began to be told that a valuable horse had been bought for the wife of Silver Hill's most opulent resident. Along in May, horse, horse furniture, and hostler all arrived in a horse-car, chartered for the trip. She could have had a groom from Gotham as well as the expensive saddle and bridle, had she expressed but a wish. She wanted no groom, said she. Of course not, said gossip; a groom would be much in the way.

It was Langham who told Mr. Bullard where to order the fine, London-made outfit. It was Langham who wrote for him as to the horse. It was Langham who rode away to town and saw to it that Roscoe was properly bitted and girthed, and saw her safely in saddle for the initial ride. After that it was unnecessary, as she rode, and Roscoe guided, so well. It saved time to meet half way. Then, when it pleased them to join the joyous party from the fort, they were by long odds the most stylish pair in the field.

Now, it must not be inferred that Langham was neglectful of garrison equestriennes. There were only five at the fort who really rode, two young matrons and three maids, one of the latter a girl of only sixteen, another of

the latter well-nigh thirty. Langham invited each in turn to go with him, and rode with Flora Cullin more than once. He even took her out on one occasion on his second horse ; but—it may have been the fault of her hand—at all events the brute began boring in a way that nearly pulled her over the pommel, and, much as she longed to ride him regularly, in the hopes of reforming him perhaps, Langham shook his head. The one girl who could ride Champion, bore or no bore—the girl who didn't care what he did or how he ran—was blithe, merry Kitty Belden, the sixteen-year-old referred to, and she was the one creature, Fox excepted, to whom Langham was willing to trust him. Kitty could not understand it that her mother, an energetic woman of much domestic piety, and little patience, soon discouraged her riding with Mr. Langham or using Mr. Langham's horse, but this was not until after Mrs. Bullard from town began to join the hunt and be escorted more than half way home by their garrison beau. On such occasions as Langham rode with some one of the army women, Mrs. Bullard would be sure to lack no attention at other hands, for Crabbe, Palmer, Shannon, and several more were eager to be at her side, and smilingly she made her cavalier welcome. *But*, three riding days out of five Langham met and joined her and saw her safely almost, if not all the way, home—sometimes stayed

and dined with them in town, always danced three or four times with her when she came to the hops, and never, until to-night, was known to miss a hop when she was said to be coming. This night, as Briggs well knew, she was already here, one of the party at the colonel's.

Yet Langham had written that he must be in town to meet the night express. Now, if by any chance Crabbe should ask to leave the post, or he, too, should fail to appear at the dance, Briggs could know just what to expect. He was fairly startled, therefore, when Captain Sparker, seeing the adjutant at his desk, came slowly in and said:

"Briggs, if Mr. Crabbe seeks permission to be away over night, I suggest that you suggest to the colonel that he would be wise to say no." Briggs nodded. Sparker sidled away "to avoid question," he explained later, and when the dance fairly and finally began, lo, there was Crabbe, dancing and "gallivanting" as though nothing had happened. It was not until midnight that he was suddenly missed.

Somewhere after midnight—some minutes before the sentries should begin calling the half hour—Kitty Belden, like a plaintive, pretty Cinderella forbidden to see her prince at the ball, was sitting at the open window of her room, moping a bit and wishing she was two years older, and listening to the soft strains of cornet and viol, mel-

lowed by distance, floating from the brilliantly lighted hoproom across the dim, starlit parade. Captain Belden and his wife had come home half an hour earlier, and, after brief admonition to Kitty, were now retiring for the night. The waltz music ceased, the silence of the mountains, the far-spreading prairie, the over-arching firmament, settled upon the fort and the broad surrounding valley. Somewhere out toward the southwest a faint dull roar and rumble, now rising, now dying, told that the night express, though belated, was boring on into the heart of the Sagamore Range. Then even this sound died away, and save a low murmur as of voices of the night, the post seemed wrapped in slumber. Away to the east the electric lights of Silver Hill were blinking in the dim distance, and suddenly, between the window where she sat and a low gap in the southeastward hills, a ruddy little flash twinkled through the dusk, then another—two others—quickly followed. Then, low, yet distinct, the sound of three shots came pulsating through the night, and almost instantly the sentry on Number Three, out on that front, woke the echoes with a shout for the corporal of the guard.

Then came the sound of echoing cries, then swift running footfalls, then the dull, distant, rhythmical thud of galloping hoofs coming nearer and nearer, straight for

the gun-flanked entrance beyond the post of the guard. There they swerved and quickened as though someone had striven to head off and halt the runner. Then on they came, bounding; then suddenly died away behind some intervening buildings; then windows began to fly up and heads to appear and excited voices to ask what was the matter; and then the hoofs were heard on the soft ground at the rear of the quarters, where stood the little shed stables, and then Champion's eager neigh welcoming his stable mate, now drooping and panting at the door. Kitty Belden, hurrying through the hallway to the rear window, got there just in time to hear the sentry's answer to some hail from up the row.

“It's Lieutenant Langham's horse, ma-am, an' he's all bloody.”

CHAPTER III

THE ACCUSING INSIGNIA.

THE dance went on. Someone had inspired the string orchestra, for, to the adjutant's surprise, there came no "kick" at midnight. They had been "refreshed" in the anteroom, and were playing with unaccustomed vim when the cap of the officer of the guard appeared for a moment at a side window of the cardroom. Potts, the post quartermaster, was summoned from a game of dummy, and Briggs from the buffet. They vanished through a side door with no woman the wiser. Neither was valuable as a partner on the floor; each had his good points at the game. But, when it was noted that young Dr. Griscom was gone, and the senior surgeon, Warren, was summoned, then people began to whisper and ask questions, and some women to pale, for Mr. Langham had not been at the hop. Mr. Crabbe, who had been, was gone upwards of half an hour, and many tongues had been telling with more or less elaboration of the clash between the two young officers in front of the mess, and of Crabbe's vehement threat that followed. Such a thing, on general principles, is seldom told at the

time to the commanding and responsible officer. He is apt to hear of it, to his detriment, only later. At 12.50 the colonel, looking at his watch and yawning behind a broad, kid-gloved hand, was wondering how soon Mrs. Mack would be ready to quit dancing ("bouncing with the boys," Mack called it), and go home, when he noted that the music had ceased again, that sounds of chat and laughter were stilled, that people were huddling in groups and murmuring in low tones, ominously, and with fearful glances, and then came the only woman in the garrison that wasn't afraid of him—his wife—and her florid face was filled with portent. "Have you heard, Mack?" she hoarsely whispered. "They're bringing in Langham, shot. Now hware's Crabbe?" In moments of excitement Mrs. Mack paid unwilling tribute to her almost forgotten nationality, and Mack, sturdy soldier that he was, if easy-going, never failed to realize in this symptom the signal to be up and doing. It roused him as the trumpet rouses the war-horse. He was on his feet on the instant, and out of the door forthwith, and with him vanished the last lingering doubt as to the truth of the flitting rumor.

At this moment the sentries were calling the hour of one. The carriages of the Bullards and Stringhams, rival social forces in town, and the two livery carry-alls that

had come laden with Silver Hill society not yet burdened with the care of their own equipage, were waiting on the road in front of the assembly room. Prominent among those who came hastening forth in quest of accurate news was Bullard himself, a burly man, and forceful. With him were three or four officers and as many civilians. The women, as a rule, remained within the room, murmuring together in knots of three or four. Some few were tremulous. All were glancing furtively, eagerly about in search of still another, and at the moment, at the flag-draped archway to the ladies' dressing room, she suddenly, smilingly appeared, looked quickly back at the deft-handed maid who had been repairing a rent in her flimsy skirt, then her bright eyes sought the ballroom in search of her escort, who had unaccountably disappeared. Then the bright color, the winsome smile, began to fade as she noted that no women were seated, but all were clustering in groups, white-faced, whispering; that most men had gone. Then she came swiftly forward, the eyes of all the room upon her, and hailed the nearest circle with: "Something has certainly happened. Tell me what it is."

As luck would have it, Mrs. Mack, the ever resolute, was of this group and first to answer.

"It's bad news, Mrs. Bullard. I may as well tell you—Mr. Langham's shot and they're bringing him home."

Whosoever expected to see Mrs. Bullard faint or collapse was destined to grieve. Mrs. Bullard actually blazed with sudden energy.

"Shot! When? Where?" she demanded; and then, as they seemed dazed and bewildered, away she sped to the open doorway, passing unnoticed other groups that scanned her narrowly, and then she fairly flung herself upon her husband's arm.

"You're here!" they heard her say. "Where is—where did—it happen?"

"Out on the flats, they say, near the ford," was the reluctant answer. "They've gone for a stretcher."

"Gone for a *stretcher*! And you here with a carriage!" Then down the steps she flew, and over the walk. "Mr. Shannon!" she called, to the young cavalryman just hurrying by, "if you know where to find him, tell my coachman and come."

"My coachman!" "My ladyship's orders!" "My lord passed by as of no account!" "Lieutenant Shannon, —th Cavalry, U. S. A., imperiously bidden to drop what he was about and go with my lady!" Fancy the verbal comments of the women that watched and waited as the carriage went spinning away to the prairie gate, my lady and Shannon silent within, the stretchermen speedily left behind. As for Bullard, the burly and force-

ful, he stood a moment with gloom stamped upon his face and a curse stifled on his lips, then made his way to the cardroom, now deserted of all save attendants, and stopped at the sideboard.

A mile away a shadowy little group had gathered about a prostrate man. A bleeding and senseless head was supported on the young surgeon's knee. Briggs and the quartermaster were bending anxiously over them. Some men of the guard, with lanterns, were searching the neighborhood where the bridle-path made a short cut over the shallows of the creek. Other shadowy forms, singly or by twos or threes, were hastening over from the fort. Some one of these had shouted, "Hold up," as the Bullard carriage whirled swiftly by, but the driver never held until it reached the bank above the ford. Then Mrs. Bullard sprang out, unassisted, never waiting for slow-witted Shannon, and in a second she, too, was bending over them, when young Dr. Griscom looked up in her white but beautiful face. She needed to ask no question.

"Serious," he said, "and how serious we cannot tell—here."

"Then take my carriage and get him—home. The stretcher is nowhere yet in sight."

They lifted the senseless form, and it was a difficult thing. The doctor clambered in, and the men hoisted.

Langham was placed with his head on the doctor's shoulder and his legs doubled up on the opposite seat. "Jump in," said she to Briggs, quick, commanding, and he, long schooled to silent tolerance of woman's ways, obeyed without question. "Help the doctor hold him," she added. "Now, drive carefully, James. Dr. Griscom will direct you."

"But you, Mrs. Bullard? We can make room for you," began Briggs.

"Make room for nobody!" said this Zenobia of the frontier. "I'm coming afoot. Drive on, James!" And the carriage turned and rolled away. The colonel and chaplain, more men of the guard, more officers on the run, the stretchermen on the jog-trot, all these it passed in its swift whirl to the post, leaving nearly a dozen men hunting for sign, searching the banks of the stream and the length of the road.

"Let the doctors look after Langham," said Mack. "What I want is the man who did this."

And that Langham was "done" was the first story sent in circulation that woeful night. It was much after one when they got him to bed and could examine his injuries. By that time he had for a moment regained consciousness, perhaps through pain, but, no more than the dead could he tell who or what had felled him. Again he had lapsed

into almost deathlike swoon, and both doctors were plainly anxious. By half an hour later while these skilled practitioners and their two attendants worked over the bruised and senseless form, the colonel with some of his older officers had been taking counsel and evidence in the front room, the "parlor," sacred to the four o'clock teas in the early spring, now invaded by solemn-faced men of various grades.

Corporal Stone of the second relief, summoned before them, had stated that the first he knew of trouble was the cry of Number Three. There was talking at the guard-house, and he had heard no shot. He ran because he knew it was trouble. Number Three said there was shooting out at the fords, and they could hear the galloping hoofs of a horse coming home. Stone took two men who had run after him, and double-timed out over the prairie, and there at the first ford they found Lieutenant Langham lying on his face, stunned and bleeding. Stone sent a man back on the run for the doctor and to notify the officers. More men came, and they dashed water in the Lieutenant's face and tried to stanch the bleeding, and others hunted for tracks when the lanterns came, but Stone knew nothing more.

Ramsdell, sergeant of the guard, stated that the horse left blood tracks as he ran through the gateway. Num-

ber Seven and other men who examined him back of Lieutenant Langham's quarters, said a bullet had gone across the breast; that he was foaming, panting, and bleeding. The sentry on Number Three told of hearing the first shot, turning instantly and looking southeastward; then seeing two flashes and hearing two other shots before calling the corporal. Fox was summoned and couldn't be found. Fox had been conspicuous early in the evening. Fox had saddled and bridled Mr. Langham's pet horse, and brought him round somewhere about 9.45. It was after ten when the lieutenant rode away. Fox and the lieutenant had some words, said Captain Curran, who lived next door. The lieutenant had rebuked Fox sharply and sternly, and Fox had replied in a tone Captain Curran had never before heard him use. He couldn't help thinking Fox might have been drinking. On this point Mr. Briggs was positive: Fox had been drinking. It was noticeable to him at the adjutant's office at eight o'clock—was probably more so to Langham at ten. Colonel Mack gave orders that systematic search be made for Fox all over the post, and every "shack" was ordered open to expedite the matter.

Most of the officers, whether bidden or not, had come to Langham's to see what they could do, or to answer questions if need be, but Mr. Crabbe was not one of these.

Nor did Mack send for him. By this time, of course, the story of the afternoon's ugly clash at the mess had been told to the post commander, and the situation, bad enough at the start, became suddenly worse. Mrs. Bullard, walking back to the post with young Shannon, had gone to the colonel's for certain of her wraps, she said, and Shannon was sent to find her husband with the message that she was now ready to go home. Bullard was a long time coming. He explained that it was necessary to dry and cleanse the deep blood stains on the back and seat of the carriage. He, too, it seems, had driven out to the scene of the affray, supposing, he said, his wife to be still there. He went by the road and she came by the stream bank, a favorite walk. They did not see the colonel to say good-night. They left about two o'clock, without that ceremony, but not without reining up in front of Langham's to inquire for the latest tidings of the wounded man. Briggs, just back from the quarters of Lieutenant Crabbe, came to the carriage door and answered Mrs. Bullard, for, as usual, that spirited woman did the talking for both. Mr. Langham was in very serious shape, was all he could say, and both doctors agreed that the worst might follow if he did not pull up by morning. Mrs. Bullard was full of deep sympathy, interest, anxiety, and then—she asked a curious question:

“How and where is Mr. Crabbe?”

“At his quarters,” said Briggs stoutly, “and he is very much shocked and distressed.” Briggs did not especially like Crabbe, but he wouldn’t have any woman supposing that even a man he didn’t like could so far forget his station as an officer and gentleman as to be concerned in so brutal, so mad, an assault as this. Briggs said good-night, and slammed the carriage door resentfully. He went in and told his colonel Mr. Crabbe was at his quarters awaiting his, Colonel Mack’s, wishes, and would not stir from them until sent for, a species of self-imposed arrest entirely unnecessary, and this, too, at a time when Mr. Crabbe would gladly have felt himself at liberty to go and make search on his own account. He had lost the beautiful insignia worn by him as a Companion by Inheritance in the Military Order of the Loyal Legion. It was on the left breast of his full dress uniform, together with his sharp-shooter’s badge and the cross of the Sons of the American Revolution, when he was dancing with Mrs. Stringham, for Mrs. Stringham had remarked them and asked what they all meant and why he didn’t wear them every day.

They were all in place when he stopped at the side-board in the cardroom a little later. Mr. Bullard and others from town spoke of them while having a glass of

punch together. About twelve he had gone over to his own quarters, he said, to change a pair of patent leather dancing boots for something older and more comfortable, as the new ones had drawn his feet and been extremely tight and painful. While there he saw that his collar was wilted, as well as his shirt, and he concluded to make a complete change. It took some time. He even put his feet in a tub of cold water. It must have been 12.50, or later, he said, when, on donning again his uniform, he missed his Loyal Legion insignia. He was searching for that about his own quarters when Captain Sparker came hurrying in and told him the shocking news. This was toward one.

All this detail had Crabbe hurriedly confided to Briggs during the latter's brief visit in search of him, and Briggs concluded it was of such importance that he took a sheet of paper and jotted it down, reading it over to Crabbe before returning to the impromptu council. Briggs gave no more thought to the Loyal Legion insignia. What was the loss of a bauble in face of a murder mystery?

He read off his notes to the colonel and the assembled officers, and Major Baker, of the cavalry, the second in command, sat and looked straight at him every moment as he read.

"You've got it exact, have you?" he asked of Briggs, as the adjutant finished.

"Exact as I could, from a hurried narrative," answered Briggs. "And Crabbe acquiesced in every word when I read it aloud to him."

The major sat one moment in silence, then turned on Captain Sparker: "How was Crabbe dressed and what was he doing when you entered?" said he, and the effect was marked and instant.

"Why—in his shirt sleeves, and he seemed to be—hunting round. He had his uniform coat on his arm."

"Room looked as though he'd been washing and changing his shirt and—other things?" queried Baker.

"Why, yes; he said so. There was some disorder. Things flung about. Tub and basin by the washstand, but nothing in the least unusual." And Sparker's face was clouding, his eyes were filling with a new light and anxiety.

"That's all, then," replied the major, a grim look on his weather-beaten face. "I'd like, Colonel Mack, to have Mr. Crabbe come here and tell us a little more, if you'll kindly send for him."

With that he arose and sauntered into the hall and thence tip-toed to the room where Langham lay feebly moaning at intervals. Warren's hand was at the patient's

wrist, his sensitive fingers on the pulse, and his anxious eyes sought those of Major Baker with a shade of displeasure. He disliked the intrusion.

"Any change?" whispered Baker. Warren slowly shook his head.

"Can you say that he will live till morning?" Warren pondered a bit, then, still more slowly, shook his head again. The major returned, angering. The veterinarian was giving his theory as to the injuries inflicted on the beautiful bay, whose bleeding was finally stanchèd, but who lay in his box stall back of Langham's, suffering from shock and weakness, with Champion wonderingly nosing the intercepting grating. They had had to break in the stable to reach the stall. Fox was gone with the keys.

And then came Briggs again, and Crabbe, the latter very pale and very nervous, as all could see. No time was lost in preliminaries. "Have I your permission, colonel?" asked the major, and wonderingly the colonel said aye.

"The adjutant has read your statement, Mr. Crabbe. You wish us to believe that you have not been outside the post?"

"Certainly, sir," was the prompt reply, yet the lips and fingers both were twitching.

“And that you had nothing whatsoever to do with this attack on Lieutenant Langham?” And the major’s eyelids were screwing down to a narrow slit. His tone was menacing.

“Not a thing, sir,” and still, though Crabbe spoke promptly, confidently, he winced before the stern, level gaze.

“You lost your Loyal Legion badge after 11.30, I think you said.”

“I did,” answered Crabbe. Now all men’s eyes were fixed upon him, and there seemed to be a catching, a holding of breath throughout the room. Deliberately the major drew forth a glistening cross of gold and enamel with a tri-colored bit of ribbon, from beneath the breast of his coat.

“This is numbered seven thousand and blank—your number, I think,” said he, in a voice that shook in spite of himself, “and I found it in the sand at the ford, not ten feet from where Mr. Langham lay.”

CHAPTER IV

A CHAMPION MISSING.

IN close arrest Lieutenant Crabbe had gone to his quarters. Nay, more. So serious were Langham's injuries—so doubtful the result—that, for the first time in the history of Fort Minneconjou, armed sentries stood at the door of an officer's room. The colonel's impromptu council had dissolved. Belden and Sparker, brother captains of the 2—th, trudged home together in awed silence until they reached the latter's gate. Belden was a man much esteemed for his modesty and worth. Sparker was known rather for his money—or that of his indulgent mate. Beyond comradeship in the service there was little in common between the two men. Belden, a strict disciplinarian in his own household, had no words to waste on the management of others'—the most persistent critics in such affairs being the men or women negligent or ignorant as to their own. Sparker was a sower of dragon's teeth, a man to whom was ever traced much of the little meannesses afloat, like malignant microbes, in the social atmosphere at the fort. With no children of his own, Sparker was full of comment on

parental weaknesses as exhibited about him. With no erudition beyond that picked up in a yawning contemplation of newspaper headlines, he was prone to sneer at those who studied deeper. With no temporal anxieties to teach him sympathy and charity, he overflowed with captious criticism of those who fell behind. And, having started nine-tenths of such garrison gossip as was of masculine origin, he was now virtuously indignant at the cavalry major who had "brought such disgrace upon the name of the army." "Don't you think," he began at Belden, as they reached the gallery, "he ought to have gone privately to Crabbe and told him what he'd found, and let—let him——"

"Resign?" said Belden quietly, "with a possible murder to be accounted for?"

"Well, perhaps not—that," stammered the captain. "But don't you think he took the worst way of advertising the whole business?"

Sparker was an adept in that sort of dragging forth of personal opinion by the roots, as it were, that enables a man to triumphantly quote So-and-So and So-and-So as backing his views, when, in point of fact, the men referred to seldom, if ever, were of his way of thinking. Belden knew his neighbor of old, and could not be trapped.

"The business is bound to be advertised far and wide," said he. "The major couldn't prevent it."

"Awe—well, but now, Belden, don't you think——"

"I think," said Belden very calmly, "that it is high time we got to bed, and tried not to think, if we're to sleep at all before to-morrow's inspection."

"You don't suppose 'Old Hardtack' will have us out after—after what happened to-night?" blustered Sparker impulsively.

"Our orders are to be in readiness for anything," was the answer. "Good-night, Sparker," and Belden broke away, glanced up at a pallid little face that peeped between the white dimity curtains of a dormer window above his soldier parlor, and, heavy-hearted, stole back to bed. Matters at Minneconjou, though he would not prate of them, were giving him sad cause for worry, and that dearly loved face of his little girl was what troubled him most. With all his heart he was beginning to wish that Kitty had not won such fame as a rider, and that "Pat" Langham, with his handsome face and handsome horses, had never come to the regiment. He knew she would be waiting for him at the head of the stairs, and that she was waiting to ask for news of him, and there she was at the landing, her glossy, rippling hair "falling down to her waist," her big, beautiful eyes pathetic with

inquiry and supplication, her slender form shivering a bit in its dainty night robe, but shivering not from cold. Belden's big heart was moved at the sight, though his head would have counseled reproof. His arm stole about her, as he gently drew her to her own door. "No worse, at least, little woman," he said, "and sleeping quietly when I came away. So be good, and go and do likewise."

But she clung to his arm. She would know.

"Is it—serious—dangerous?" she pleaded.

"Serious, yes. Dangerous, I hardly know. I think the doctors hardly know. But they are hopeful."

Again she shivered. "But, Daddy dear, do they say—do they know—who did it?"

"Well, no. Why, where's mother?" he asked, noting that the marital chamber was deserted.

"She went in to Mrs. Sparker's for news. She said she was too excited to sleep. She's coming now."

Coming the good lady certainly was, coming with portentous face, having learned that her liege had returned, having waited only long enough to hear the startling tidings of Crabbe's arrest and how it was brought about. She was into the open hallway and up the stairs before the captain could persuade Kitty to step within her own threshold. She was upon him with the natural and im-

pulsive exclamation: "Well, isn't that just too horrible for anything?—an officer—becoming a vile assassin!"

"Hush, Kate," said Belden, striving to lure her away from the subject and into her room. "It is—purely circumstantial as yet."

"Purely circumstantial, when his Loyal Legion badge is found right there on the spot! Kitty, I told you to go to bed two hours ago."

"Whose Loyal Legion Badge? Where was it?" demanded the girl, springing back, barefooted, into the hallway. Mrs. Belden would have denied her further information and had her lying awake in suspense and terror until dawn, and then, when too late to mend matters, telling her as a last resort. It was Belden who spoke, his theory being that it was always best to tell the truth and end all mystery.

"Mr. Crabbe's Loyal Legion badge, my girly," said he, gently drawing her back to the little room. "It was picked up at the ford, close to the spot. There had been angry words between them, and—listen!"

Somebody was knocking at the door, knocking vehemently. Had there not been enough excitement for one night? Belden hurried down, and there stood the adjutant. "You're dressed—already. Come right over as you are. The colonel wants to see you at once," were

his words, as he led on toward the little gate. "You'll find the major there and—'Old Hardtack's' taking a hand now."

It was then after two—long after. The barracks of the men, the assembly hall, the storehouse, and offices were all wrapped in darkness. Lights burned dimly at the guard-room and at many of the officers' quarters, while at the colonel's the ground floor was still brightly illuminated. Two cavalry horses with heaving flanks stood in front of the gate, held by a single trooper. His comrade was at the hall doorway, chatting in low tone with the orderly of the commanding officer. "We made it in fifty minutes—there'n back," Belden heard him say, as he passed quickly in. There in the flag-draped army parlor stood the gray-haired inspector general, his lined face full of concern. There under the chandelier, tramping nervously up and down, fretful and ill at ease, was the colonel. There on the sofa, his hands thrust deep in his trouser's pockets, his legs outstretched, was Major Baker, dubious, perhaps, and perturbed in spirit, as shown by his most unsoldierly pose, yet truculent and holding to his point. There was a fourth figure in the room, that of a man in cool garments, and heated argument, with a fifth—the sheriff of Sagamore County.

In the first civilian Belden recognized Mr. Murray,

landlord of the Argenta, one of the local hostelrys of the better class, the one most affected by post people when they lunched or shopped in town. The moment Belden entered the room Colonel Mack abruptly stopped his nervous walk and strove to stop the debate, which, having become pointed and acrimonious, bade fair to reach listening ears on the landing above. Both Boniface and sheriff had long been at odds, rival candidates for office and claimants for a hand, the sheriff winning both events to the profuse and profane disgust of the rival. The landlord had come as a volunteer to launch valuable information. The sheriff had come as a drafted man, straight from his slumbers to controversy, for what Boniface had said the sheriff scouted, and no one present could say which man was right.

"I tell you," clamored the former, "I saw him talking excitedly, you could almost say imploringly, with this stranger at the train. I always meet the express, even when it is late as it was to-night. They walked up and down together as much as five minutes. Then this third man joined them, and I knew him the moment I set eyes on him. It's my business to know every face I've ever seen before. It was Pyne, the young Britisher that killed the soldier at Cheyenne the winter of '89."

"That man hasn't been seen or heard of in these

parts for six years," burst in the sheriff. "He went back to England after his pardon; that was one of the conditions——"

"Hush, gentlemen!" pleaded the colonel. "Not so loud. Let me ask a question, as I wish Captain Belden to hear. Captain, you were at Cheyenne at that time, as I remember, and you saw this young man Pyne?"

"I was in command of a detachment of recruits going through," answered Belden gravely. "I saw him after his arrest—after the affray, and again during the trial, but that was all."

"I was running the Eureka restaurant at Cheyenne at that time," again broke in the landlord. "He stopped at my place. I saw him a dozen times, and I can't be mistaken. He was the man that rode away with Lieutenant Langham to-night."

"Did you see him ride away?" demanded the sheriff.

"I didn't see him *ride* away. I saw him *walk* away with Langham toward the stable, and the stable hands will tell you they rode away together, heading for the fort, and it wasn't an hour after that the cry went up at the bar that Lieutenant Langham had been shot out there at the fords, and that's what brought me here. *Find that man Pyne.*"

"And I'll bet that man Pyne isn't anywhere in these

parts, and can't be," declared the sheriff. "So there you are."

The colonel turned impatiently away. "You see how it is, Belden," he began. "Our friend of the Argenta declares somebody rode away from town with Langham. He says two or three men can swear to that. He says the man was Pyne, who shot a soldier in your detachment at Cheyenne in '89. There are so many hoofprints all along the banks about the fords that I have had to send men further in toward town, searching the trail with lanterns. Somewhere it may be found that two horses came loping out to-night together. There's someone coming now!"

It was Potts, regimental quartermaster, and Potts came swiftly, silently in and stopped straight in front of his colonel.

"It's so, sir. Half a mile east of the fords we found two places on the trail where the ground was soft and muddy. Two horses came this way, probably together."

The announcement was heard in almost oppressive silence. It meant far more than was apparent at first to all those present. Only the officers knew that, charged with the crime, Lieutenant Crabbe was now in close arrest. Only they could realize what intensity of relief it would bring to Minneconjou could that crime be

fastened on a rank outsider and the stain be swept from the uniform.

Murray's story, as hastily told long after one, was indeed of almost startling interest. Two of the colonel's guests, he said, Mr. and Mrs. Chauncey, driving home in their buggy at half past twelve, had stopped in front of the Argenta and declared that they were overtaken half way to Silver Hill by a horseman who galloped wildly on toward town, and cried to them that Lieutenant Langham had been shot by road agents. Nobody else as yet, however, seemed to have seen this fleeing horseman; but Murray, the moment he heard the news, "piled into the bus," as he expressed it, and told his man to drive like sin to the fords. He felt so sure he knew the shooter, and that the shooter could be caught if promptly traced and followed, that, when four miles out, he came suddenly on two troopers scouting the prairie, he did not hesitate to bid them gallop over to Sheriff Blossom's ranch on the North Fork, and west of Silver Hill. They were to "rout out" that official and get him to the colonel's at once. He was well on his way thither before the conference at Langham's broke up for the night.

It was Murray's profound conviction that the wild horseman who had startled the Chaunceys was Pyne him-

self, a man he had known when, young, friendless, and without means, he had drifted into the Eureka at Cheyenne, and there dwelt some days, as it turned out, at Murray's expense. The lad "hocussed" him, he said, with stories of wealthy kindred in England, and by the casual display of a beautiful watch. He was waiting for his luggage and remittances, but before these could come a recruit train pulled into the station late one night, a squad of devil-may-care blue-coats got away somewhere; speedily found whisky, and then, when ripe for mischief, ran foul of this lone young Englishman, whom they forthwith proceeded to "guy." He knocked two of his tormentors into the gutter, and was then set upon by the entire party. Within two minutes thereafter he would probably have been kicked into pulp had he not, within ten seconds, whipped out his pistol and opened fire. The police swooped upon the party, capturing one dead and one wounded soldier, and one battered, bleeding young Briton with a smoking revolver tight-grasped in his fist. The other recruits had scattered. When the case came to trial, however, it was six against one. The soldiers stoutly swore they were only "having a little fun with him" when he whirled on them and shot two. Not until after Pyne had been convicted and sentenced did his friends begin to be heard from. Not until the state de-

partment, through the diplomatic and consular service, had had voluminous correspondence and the lad long months of languishing in jail, did his side of the story begin to tell on the public mind. At last came a pardon, coupled with advice to quit the state and the practice of carrying concealed weapons, both of which were readily promised, and young Pyne was called for by English kin-folk and whisked away eastward and then beyond. Two men who knew him well in his few Cheyenne days were Murray, then mine host of the Eureka, and Blossom, then deputy sheriff; the former inimical because defrauded, the latter friendly because he had profited by the bounty of Pyne's kindred when they finally came. Possibly in the face of graver things the lad had never thought to tell his people of his little debt.

All this was set before the colonel and his chosen few in the murmured conference that followed Murray's truculent announcement. He was for having Blossom take instant measures to run down the possible murderer, who could be none other than Pyne, while Blossom sturdily scoffed at the whole theory, declared his belief that Pyne was not in America, and his conviction that he was in no wise concerned in the case. Blossom said his suspicions pointed to Fox.

"Why?" snapped the colonel and Major Baker, in a

breath. They had kept him still in ignorance of Crabbe's arrest, and Mack, at least, was overjoyed at the possibility of clearing the cloth. Hardly another sound was heard as the civil official began his reply. In strained attention, every man now on his feet, they listened, breathless.

"Because Fox has had some trouble with the lieutenant. Because he was in town drinking two evenings ago, and let fall some things about Mr. Langham he never would have said if he hadn't been in ugly mood, and when some barroom loafer laughed at him, probably to provoke him into saying more, he declared that he could tell things that would 'drive the damned snob out of the army.' Those were his own words. He said he would have quit the lieutenant's service six weeks ago if he could have got his wages——" And here the eyes of the adjutant and quartermaster met across the parlor table. "He said the lieutenant himself might have to skip the country any minute, and then he'd get his pay out of things the lieutenant couldn't take with him. Now, you tell me Fox is missing. There's the man I mean to look for."

For a moment no man spoke. Then the colonel turned on Briggs. "You heard some strange words between them this afternoon. What were they?"

Briggs flushed and balked, painfully. It was one thing to have to tell his commander, in confidence, of words he had accidentally overheard that pointed to Fox as having a grievance. It was another to tell it to a room half full. Briggs looked appealingly at his colonel, but Mack was obdurate. He resented Major Baker's melodramatic method of bringing Crabbe to grief. He felt that a stigma had been planted upon the fair name of the regiment, and all through Baker's meddling action. He held, and held with reason, that Baker's proper course was to acquaint him, the commanding officer, with what he had found, and then let the commanding officer in his own way confront the suspected man with this unsuspected evidence. It would be a lesson to Baker if now, after all, they could muster evidence so strong against the servingman as to relax the pressure on the subaltern. "These gentlemen have all heard so much they may just as well hear what you heard, especially Major Baker," said the colonel sententiously, and with significant look at the junior field officer. Thus adjured Briggs bluntly said his say.

"They were packing or unpacking some things, revolvers, among others. Fox seemed surly or sullen, and I heard Mr. Langham speaking somewhat angrily. What he said practically was this: 'Knowing what you do,

then you should have got everything ready at once. I may start any moment.’”

Again there was silence. No one seemed to know just what to say. Murray sank into a chair and sat glaring at Blossom. The latter was the first to speak:

“That tallies with what I heard—with what I know—Fox let slip in town. Again I say Fox is the man we should be chasing, and you tell me he has not been seen since ten o’clock, and had been drinking again?” This to Briggs. The adjutant bowed. It was as Blossom had said.

“And you had to break in the stable door, I understand, to get the wounded horse to his stall. If I were in your place, colonel, I’d have that door replaced and locked this very night. There’s neither stage nor train until afternoon, and if Fox skips, or has skipped, it’s in saddle probably. There isn’t a horse hereabouts can catch either of those runners of Mr. Langham’s with Fox up.”

“He’d have to get him out right under the sentry’s nose,” said the colonel. “But the suggestion is good. See to it first thing in the morning, Potts. And here’s the officer-of-the-day now. I want you to give your sentry orders to watch that stable of Mr. Langham’s especially.” The colonel had turned, as he spoke, to a

solemn-faced, soldierly looking officer who come clanking swiftly in. But they read tidings in his somber eyes before ever he opened his lips.

“Mr. Langham’s stable, sir?” was the embarrassed answer. “I fear it’s too late. The sergeant has just come running to tell me that Champion is gone.”

CHAPTER V

THE LADY IN THE CASE.

ANOTHER night had come to Minneconjou and still other theories as to the assault. Langham's few conscious moments had been spent in such severe pain that the surgeons found themselves forced to administer opiates. In answer to questions the injured man gasped that he saw no assailant. The shots came from the darkness. Now Fox and Champion both had vanished from the scene. The gallant horse had been led from the little stable while the sentry, either through collusion or stupidity, was sauntering up his post full fifty yards away. This according to his own wretched story. He claimed that, until the sergeant's visit, he never saw anything of horse or human after the veterinarian and his assistants left at half past one. It was on the stroke of three when the sergeant of the guard came running up the road to tell his tale. Number Six had then been taken off post, stripped forthwith of arms and equipment, and confined in the guard-house. Number Six swore stoutly that Fox hadn't been anywhere about the stable, that if the horse was gone he had just broken his halter

shank and started. But Champion could never have saddled and bridled himself, and saddle and bridle, Langham's handsome English set, were gone with the horse. They trailed him with lanterns across the springy bunch grass of the mesa, down into the bed of the North Fork, then away eastward toward the sheriff's ranch, and the sheriff went lumbering to town to wire far and wide, and warn all fellow officers to look out for the fugitive. But no pursuit was ordered from the post. Fox and Champion could ride nearly two miles to a trooper's one. Fox's self obliteration had, of course, concentrated suspicion on himself. But Briggs and Gridley had been looking over Langham's quarters, and the amount of loose change and trinkets in the upper drawers of his bureau—items to which Fox had easy and frequent access—caught their attention at once. If Fox had fled it was strange he left so much cash and convertible assets behind. True, after the assault there might have been no opportunity to help himself, but there had been abundant time before. And that the assault was planned and premeditated was a thing no man could actually assert, yet that all men felt. Langham, in the moment that he could speak of it at all, had declared the shots came without word of warning. He had swooned again before they could question him as to his companion.

And so at noonday, the second of "Old Hardtack's" official visit, there were no less than three different men suspected of being Langham's assailant. Major Baker and a few of his backers and believers held to the theory that Crabbe was the criminal. There was the damning and damaging evidence of his precious Loyal Legion insignia. Sheriff Blossom, with Lieutenant Briggs and almost all the junior officers, clung to the conviction that Fox was the traitor who had done his master so near to death. Murray, of the Argenta, with rather a large following of friends in town, believed that Pyne, the once conspicuous, was the would-be assassin, and these civilians were searching high and low for motive. Several citizens had seen Mr. Langham in converse with the two strangers at the station. Some had seen him walk away in company with one of the arrivals on the belated express. The train had changed engines and stopped twenty minutes. The passengers, as a rule, had taken supper at Murray's, or browsed at the lunch counter. The train was far across the great divide and spinning through the gorges of the Sagamore by the time Silver Hill began investigating on its own account, and meanwhile, first thing in the morning, Potts had taken to saddle and the prairie; had gone again to the ford and begun his researches afresh. At breakfast time

he was back at the post and the colonel's. He believed he had found that which should relieve Crabbe at once, and so expressed himself. Moreover, it disposed of Murray's theory as to Pyne, and, more compactly than before, laid the load of suspicion on the shoulders of Fox. Potts had ridden half way back to town, and studied the trail in a dozen spots and confidently declared that, whether Fox was or was not the assailant, it was Fox, not Pyne, that accompanied him on the homeward ride.

"How do you know?" asked the post commander.

"Because, had it been Pyne, they would have ridden side by side, but this man rode behind. In many a place the hoofprints of the second horse almost obliterate those of the first," was the answer, and the answer was true. Blossom saw it for himself when he came out again at midday, and Blossom had been asking questions at the stable where Langham left his beautiful horse on reaching town. The manager said that in half an hour the lieutenant was back, that he ordered an extra saddle horse; gave no word of explanation; said he would send the horse home the following morning, and then rode away, leading him. That horse wandered in at dawn, very much wearied and looking as though he had been ridden hard. Only one other thing attracted attention.

The leathers had been shortened, three holes on each side. It was remembered that Fox used a very short stirrup.

Then the railway officials, thanks to Sheriff Blossom, had been wiring after that night express. They wished the conductor to ascertain the names of two passengers in the Pullman who had had an animated talk with an officer at the station platform. They wished to know whither they were bound and whence they came, etc. The conductor replied that the names given were Brown and Jones; that the parties evidently resented such inquiries; that they came from Chicago and were going "through"; that several Pullman passengers got out at Silver Hill, but none remained there, in fact, they had two more passengers than on arriving at that point. Then while Murray's friend Pyne might have walked away with Mr. Langham before the train started, he must have returned in time and could not, therefore, have ridden forth with that officer. No, all things now pointed to the luckless Fox, and by 10 A. M. a liveryman was found who declared that he brought Fox to town at 10.30 the previous night, and had not seen him since. Then the bartender at a second-rate saloon announced that Fox was there at eleven, "pretty full" and wanted to borrow ten dollars, which was refused him. Finally Bullard's gardener, out late to

see a sweetheart, declared he saw Fox reeling toward the railway station just before the train pulled out to the west, and a minute later passed Lieutenant Langham and a stranger walking in the same direction. The chances were that the lieutenant had overtaken his groom, noticed his condition and had ordered him to be ready to ride back to the post. No one ever saw Fox so full that he couldn't ride. At noon, therefore, the possible Pyne had been eliminated from the case, much to the sheriff's triumphant satisfaction, and suspicion was now divided between Crabbe, the subaltern, and Fox, the scamp.

Then came still another searcher for information, and Mrs. Bullard, who had sent a mounted messenger to the post at eight, now followed in person at 4 P. M., and dismounted at the gate of her hostess of the night before, the wife of the commanding officer. There were dark circles about the lady's beautiful eyes, and her face had lost much of its bright color. "I have not slept an hour," said she, with frankness unlooked for. "And Mr. Bullard is quite as much distressed as I am, but he had to be at his office. I told him I would come out to see what we could do for Mr. Langham. It was a great relief to hear that he was at least no worse."

Mrs. Mack stood stately and unresponsive—"just drew myself up," as said the good lady. But Mrs.

Mack's unbending attitude, physical and mental, received distinct sense of shock with the stylish visitor's very next suggestion: "I wonder if I could see—Kitty Belden."

Now, why on earth should the mature and prominent leader of Silver Hill society desire to see the sixteen-year-old child of the garrison. Mrs. Mack could imagine all manner of reasons, but assert none. In spite of herself and her resolution, she fairly bristled with curiosity and interest. Still she was, to use her own expression, somewhat "dubersome," and her answer was hesitating. "Why, I suppose so," was the reply, "though—you know the captain and his wife have—notions."

"As to me, you mean? Yes, I have observed; but we all have our likes and dislikes. Now, I greatly like their child and fancy that I should like them were we at all acquainted, but, since returning my call last winter, Mrs. Belden hasn't been near me. And now, with this dreadful thing——" Then suddenly: "You know Kitty used to ride a good deal with Mr. Langham. Then——"

"Then her pa and ma thought it time to call a halt," said Mrs. Mack, "and it's good for her they did."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Bullard, drawing her whiplash through the slender fingers of her left hand, and looking unflinchingly in the other's flitting eyes.

"Well, it ain't for me to say. Ask them," said Mrs.

Mack. "She might have got—interested in Langham——
Some women *do*."

"*I* am one," said Mrs. Bullard, with calm and instant assurance. "He interests me more than any of your officers. As a class I find them rather dull. Mr. Langham has lived, read, seen, traveled."

Mrs. Mack could only gasp. This was brazen effrontery, thought she, yet never looked the woman brazen, never was there in her placid, polished manner a symptom of bravado. She spoke of her interest as something quite beyond criticism or suspicion, something to be considered a perfectly proper and legitimate regard, something as unobjectionable in the eyes of her lord and master as it should be, consequently, in those of her associates. Versed in the ways of society East and abroad, Mrs. Bullard had tolerance, but no sympathy, for the limitations of the West. Society in the arm of the frontier could not understand her, nor could she quite explain. Despite the dark circles, she was very handsome in her stylish riding habit, for her features were fine, her figure was still slender and beautiful, and honest, buxom Mrs. Mack, her senior by twenty unshadowed years, looked upon her enviously. There were times when Mrs. Mack could even have accepted Mrs. Bullard's questionable morals could she only have been gifted with her unquestionable graces. But

this declaration of social independence shocked the stout heart of the elder into silence. She really knew not what to say, though vaguely she felt that it should be rebuked.

“Why don’t you go and—ask for Kitty if you want to see her?”

“Because, frankly, Mrs. Mack, I have questions to ask her that are for herself alone. Now, even in telling you this I have come to ask you to help me.”

“Well, of all the extrayoniary women I ever heard of!” Mrs. Mack was saying to herself, when the trumpets began sounding stable call at the cavalry barracks. Then the bugler at the foot of the flag-staff pealed forth the summons for afternoon police. The few prisoners at the guard-house came filing forth under charge of the sentries, and Mack, himself, coming from the adjutant’s office, orderly followed, stopped one minute at his gate to study the thoroughbred and his handsome equipment, then straightway entered the house and asked: “Where is Mrs. Bullard?”

The voice that answered from a shaded nook in the parlor was sweet and silvery. “Here, colonel, and waiting for you with a score of questions,” and not at all did Mrs. Mack approve it that instantly the lady left her side and went with outstretched hand to meet the husband and putative commander. “That woman has too many fasci-

nations—and followers,” said Mrs. Mack, “and Mack himself is such a fool about—them.”

But Mack came not in mood to woo or captivate. The worries of the day and night gone by had left their impress on both his senses and his spirit. “Hardtack,” too, had had little of the laudatory to say as to the condition of the command. He had, indeed, been somewhat captious in his criticisms, and had not yet half finished his investigations. “Hardtack” had gone so far as to intimate that he, Mack, a colonel of Foot and commander of the fort, had been derelict in his dealings with these subalterns, lax in supervision, and the like. “Hardtack” thought it the duty of commanding officers to curb young gentlemen who essayed extravagance of any kind. This business of lieutenants owning fine horses and swagger outfits, Corot pictures and Persian rugs, for instance, was never heard of when he was in the line. “Hardtack” didn’t know a Corot from a chromo, possibly, but vaguely he felt that Langham’s plight was due to Langham’s patrician tastes and habits, and yet that all disaster might have been averted had Mack but curbed him—that was the word—curbed him at the outset. Now, Mack had been a fine rider in his day, and loved good horseflesh and good horsemanship to this. Therefore, if he knew anything at all, he knew that curbing was a thing to exasperate a

thoroughbred, and if it rasped and worried a horse so must curbing rasp a rider of spirit. So far as he was concerned, he said, he wished all officers owned their horses and could ride like Langham. "The regulations," said "Hardtack," "do not contemplate such—er—possibilities." And in the eyes of that accomplished officer the revised regulations of the United States army and the Holy Scriptures took rank in the order named. "As matters have turned out," said he, "it seems that Langham was living much beyond his means, and couldn't afford such luxuries."

"As matters have turned out," said Mack in reply, "Langham has been temporarily deprived of means he had every reason to count on when he came here, and I know it. The luxuries had been bought and paid for long ago—or else given to him." Nettled at this defense, the inquisitor inspector had then said something as to Langham and Langham's conduct and Mack's apparent blindness thereto that sent the colonel homeward with crackling nerves and angering eyes. There at his own gate stood, side-saddled, the evidence that the disturber of the inquisitorial peace and the post commander's serenity was probably within.

Mack came to question and remained to plead, for Mrs. Bullard's first interrogation put him on the defensive.

"Colonel Mack, have you wired Mr. Langham's relatives?"

Mack had not. He had devoutly hoped no one had thought of such a thing. It would only terrify a mother already, so he had been told, much broken in health. It would only get into the Chicago papers, said he, and that to Mack, once stationed at Fort Sheridan, meant nothing short of sheol. That it was already in the Chicago evening papers, and that managing editors of the morning sheets were wiring for full particulars, had not yet occurred to him. He felt himself chafing at this woman's presuming to question him as to what, in the line of his duty, he had or had not done. He stood at the curtained entrance from his hall to the spacious parlor, halted practically by her challenge. He felt a sneaking sense of relief when the orderly's rap was heard at the open door, and the orderly's voice in the announcement: "Telegram, sir."

He turned, tore off the envelope, unfolded the yellow-brown half sheet, and read from the office of the adjutant general at Washington the following message:

Sec. War directs seven days' leave granted Lieutenant Langham at once, to be extended from this office. Mother seriously ill.

Slowly Mack refolded the message. His eyes wan-

dered a moment, then returned to the contemplation of the graceful figure before him.

"Mrs. Bullard," said he, "they are wiring for *him*. His mother, I fear, is desperately ill. Now, I'll *have* to tell them."

"Tell *them* anything you wish, colonel," then with almost commanding emphasis, "but unless you wish to kill, tell her—or him—nothing."

CHAPTER VI

THE KNIGHT AND THE LADY.

THE wire that went to Washington in response to the mandate of the war secretary merely stated that Lieutenant Langham had met with an accident, was unconscious, and unable to travel. Particulars by mail. But both Mack and his loyal adjutant well knew by this time, and as a result of the confidences growing out of the creditors' complaints heretofore mentioned, that between Langham and his devoted mother there lived a degree of affection bordering on the intense,—a tie stronger, yet tenderer, far than usually unites mother and son. Knowing this, and having heard from Langham's lips his version of the causes of the complaints and the delays in certain payments, these two officers had not hesitated to stand between the regimental dandy and criticism from any source. "Everything has been explained to my satisfaction," said the colonel, a trifle pompously, perhaps, "and in a short time these people will be kicking themselves for ever having started proceedings against him." And with this declaration Langham's detractors found themselves confronted, and with the same

were his defenders comforted. Now, through her own impetuosity, Mrs. Bullard had revealed to Colonel Mack that she, too, had been taken into the confidence of his independent subaltern, and to an extent that enabled her, probably, to know much more of Langham's affairs and relatives than did the post commander. Whatsoever this fact may have missed in significance, so far as the colonel was concerned, it lost nothing in the eyes of his wife. Mrs. Mack had listened with all her ears, which were large, and pondered with all her soul, which was small. It was not good that a woman in no wise allied to the regiment should be the confidant of its most interesting and eligible officer, when there were so many to choose from at the fort. Mrs. Bullard was no favorite of Mrs. Mack's when police call and stables were being sounded at four o'clock. Mrs. Bullard was distinctly in madame's bad books by the time the bugles were calling the men into ranks for sunset dress parade.

It was the hour at which the valley of the Minneconjou was at its best. The low, slanting sunshine threw long shadows eastward toward the glinting spires and domes of the busy little frontier city. Pine-clad heights to the west and north fringed and framed the far-spreading picture, even as they screened the garrison and its nestling settlement from the rude blasts that came whirling and

whistling down the broad waste of the "bad lands" away toward the Yellowstone. Southward the prairie rolled, ridge after ridge, wave after wave, until it sent its gray-green surges tumbling skyward far beyond the tawny river and spanned the horizon from east to west in the long barrier of Calumet Range. So too, lay even, gentle slope, bold, rounded bluff, and gracefully winding stream—all spread before the eye, unscreened by other foliage than that of the scattered cottonwoods along the shallow, sandy reaches of the river. Far beyond the limits of the thriving county seat one could almost see where the Minneconjou poured its swift-flowing, swirling tribute into the spreading flood of the broad and turbid Cheyenne. Rollicking down from the beetling heights behind the post, the North Fork came leaping, sparkling, tossing its snowy spray, an almost ice-cold torrent at any season of the year, the joy of the angler until civilization scared away the trout; the hope of miner and prospector until science settled the silver question; and now the boast of Silver Hill as laundry, lavatory, and latent power all in one. Rushing into the valley nearly three miles north of the fort, it left that martial bailiwick far to its right and tore impetuously townwards, there to lose its crystalline and incomparable sheen, and to emerge at the eastward edge, soiled, bedraggled, and ashamed, a

city sewer and nothing more; yet, even after its base use and degradation, preserving much of the wild grace that won it the Indian name of Leaping Water. On the bank of the Fork, northwest of town, were the corrals and buildings of Sheriff Blossom's ranch. On its left bank, in the heart of Silver Hill, lay the costly and pretentious home of Amos Bullard, banker and capitalist. On both banks of the Fork, toward the eastward end of town, were smelters, foundries, and machine shops. It served them all, and served them well. It was but rudely served in turn. The railway, leaving the levels of the Cheyenne and the meanderings of the Minneconjou, wound along the fork, leaping it here and there until it reached the eastward edge of town, then curved abruptly to the southwest and crawled snake-like away over the open uplands, seeking the easiest grade to the Sagamore Pass.

One of Fort Minneconjou's diversions was to stroll or ride out southwestward, fording the lazier stream from which it was named, and to line up along the winding right-of-way and surprise the passengers of the west-bound flyer with hearty and stentorian cheer as it went puffing, panting, straining up the divide, a marked contrast to the mate it met in the heart of the pass, that came easily gliding or coasting, with smoke-spitting tires, with

wheezing complaint of the gripping brakes, and looking in the black nights of winter like fettered meteor or fiery dragon of old. Government had built a little station two miles southwest of the post, and paid for a siding, with the idea of a much shorter haul for its stores and supplies; but passengers, it was observed, still preferred to go and come via Silver Hill. Time was when a small guard had been maintained at this lonely depot out on the southwestward prairie, but Mack had long since withdrawn it as unnecessary, yet this lonely June evening, as he watched the prompt, soldierly formation of his regimental line, and wondered if "Old Hardtack" would not be in mollified mood as a result of so fine an exhibition of precision, Mack was wishing he had never recalled the outpost. Only half an hour before first call for parade, and while Mrs. Bullard was still at the post striving to extract hopeful words from Dr. Warren, a strange tale was told him by Lieutenant Gridley, Langham's one real friend among the subalterns, and Gridley had been out scouting on his own account and because of certain theories of his own.

The brief conference between the colonel and this officer was ended by these words:

"Then with your permission, sir, I will not attend parade, but will escort Mrs. Bullard home."

"So be it, Gridley. She—may tell you, as his friend—what she would never tell me."

Turning away with parting salute, Gridley stopped one moment to look at his faithful comrade, the troop horse he had been bestriding many hours of the afternoon. "Take him to the stables, orderly," he said, after an appreciative pat or two. "He has done his share to-day," then went briskly down the line, raising his cap to the groups of garrison ladies seated on the verandas in readiness to watch parade. At Dr. Warren's there was quite a little gathering, Mrs. Bullard, in her stunning riding habit, central figure of the party. They all looked up as he entered the gate. They all knew that in Jim Gridley they saw the closest friend of the sorely injured officer. They knew he had been out during much of the day, investigating on his own account, and, believing that he acted on knowledge or information shared by nobody else, were eager to hear the result. Gridley bowed gravely and comprehensively; said, "Good-evening, ladies," to all, and then, giving no time for question, addressed himself at once to the one woman of the half dozen present to whom he had hardly spoken twice in the scope of a year:

"Mrs. Bullard, may I have the pleasure of escorting you when you are ready to return?"

Mrs. Bullard flushed with surprise and a certain embarrassment. Gridley's simple directness was a thing as new to her as the invitation was unexpected. For certain reasons, she had believed he disliked or distrusted her. She had told Langham as much, and told herself that Langham had told him. A moderate degree of courtesy and attention Jim Gridley had ever shown to the women of the officers' households at the post, but attention of any kind to any woman not of the garrison circle was something never looked for in him. Nothing, therefore, could have been much more pointed or significant than his thus approaching the acknowledged leader of Silver Hill society. Motive of some kind there must be and she knew it, and naturally colored high under the instant scrutiny of her associates and the calm gaze of his deep eyes.

"You are very kind, Mr. Gridley," she replied, however. "Shall we say right after parade?"

"I shall be ready at gun fire," he answered, with a glance at the flag-staff where stood the adjutant and sergeant major awaiting the band. Another touch of his cap and he was gone, leaving them to marvel. Entering Langham's quarters he paused long enough to inquire of a nurse how the patient was doing; took one peep at the drowsing, unconscious form in the bedroom; bor-

rowed Langham's crop and steel spurs; then hastened to his own quarters. Adjutant's call had sounded and the band was banging away at "King Cotton" as he passed within the dark hallway of his little army home, shared in common with a brother bachelor whose habitat was the second floor. The band had changed its tune and was making its triumphal progress down the long, immovable line of blue and white—flanked, as Mack would have it, by yellow-plumed troopers parading afoot—when, in civilian garb, Mr. Gridley stepped forth into the rear yard of his quarters and there, awaiting him, pawing impatiently, and held by a remonstrating soldier-groom, was Major Baker's own pet mount, Ivanhoe. There, too, was Baker. Mack could not find it possible to order his cavalry major to attend parade so long as he split up the major's command, and Baker was glad enough to be excused on such terms. This evening he was more than glad.

Holding still to the belief that Crabbe had gone forth in the dead of night; had waylaid Langham on the prairie and lost his Loyal Legion insignia, possibly in some scuffle, of which Langham had as yet been able to give no account, Baker knew that he had incurred the hostility of all of Crabbe's friends and most of his fellow officers. Crabbe or Fox it must have been, said pretty much every-

body at the post, with the chances leaning, said four out of five, to Fox. Baker was distressed and unhappy over the demonstration with which many of his fellow officers had favoured him. *Esprit de corps* was still alive in the army and had a flourishing growth in the 2—th. Therefore, when at noon that day, Jim Gridley, looking worn and harassed, came in to ask permission to be absent until parade and to ride afar, Baker opened his sore heart and told his trusted subaltern his trouble. "Even Mack," said he, "treats me like a Pariah for what I have said and done, and some of the women, by gad, have cut me dead. If it should turn out after all that Crabbe was utterly innocent and Fox the guilty man, I'd wear sackcloth all summer."

"You'll not have to wear sackcloth then," said Gridley quietly.

"Do you mean you—can prove—I'm right?" asked Baker eagerly.

"I mean," said Gridley, "that I expect to prove they're *all* wrong. I want the afternoon to myself. I may want to ride to town this evening, and I need a good horse for that ride."

"Take Ivanhoe," said the major promptly, an offer he had never been known to make before, and Gridley accepted. No wonder the women looked surprised when,

just as they resumed their seats after loyally standing through the "Star Spangled Banner" Mr. Gridley came riding into view at the east end of the row and riding the major's precious and incomparable charger. Mrs. Bullard's saddler was already at the gate, pawing as impatiently as was Ivanhoe but the moment before, and casting reproachful glances at his mistress; much disturbed, too, by the recent bang of the evening gun, and giving the soldier in charge about all he could do to hold him. Gridley noted the symptoms as he and Ivanhoe drew near, and, glancing about him as he dismounted, signaled Master Jerry Warren, the doctor's eldest, and bade him hold Ivanhoe one moment while he looked to the girth and curb of the lady's thoroughbred. She was by his side and ready to mount even before he hoped, having said adieu to all at his approach, and Gridley bowed to her with appreciation in his eyes. Feminine farewells had always seemed to him interminable.

"Hold with your right just below the bit, Doyle," said he, to the orderly, "and stand close in to prevent his swinging out his haunches."

But Mrs. Bullard had no fear of her favorite's jumping from under. Already her gauntleted right hand was on the pommel and the daintily booted left foot uplifted for his aid. Gridley stooped; took it, and the lady bounded



"THERE IS JUST ONE WOMAN IN CREATION WHO
CAN SET ME RIGHT"

to her seat, light as a feather and quick as a kitten. It needed only ten seconds to adjust skirt and stirrup. She nodded a cordial good-night to the group at the piazza; smiled graciously upon the admiring Irish trooper, adding a silvery "Thank you ever so much," and with practiced hand controlled the nervous curvetting of her steed and moved slowly gateward. Gridley swung into saddle and trotted alongside. Together and in silence and both gazing into the open doorway, they moved slowly beyond Langham's quarters, then more swiftly past the statuesque sentry at the gate, and were well out upon the open prairie before the lady turned in saddle, looked squarely into her escort's eyes and demanded, "Now, Mr. Gridley, kindly explain what this means."

For answer the soldier at her side pointed southeastward over the level of the "bench" along the left bank of the Minneconjou to a point where the bridle-path dipped down to the glistening shallows of the ford.

"Mrs. Bullard," said he, "the man I most like in this garrison—the man who leans most on me—was all but murdered from ambush right there at the fords last night. Some men accuse Mr. Crabbe. Some men say Fox. I have still another theory and there is just one woman in creation who can set me right." He bent forward over the pommel that he might look up and see her eyes, for

now her head was drooping. Still she never shunned the issue. There was no tremor in the tone with which she queried, as she lifted her head.

“And who may she be, Mr. Gridley?”

The answer was the single word:

“You.”

CHAPTER VII

THE RED MAN ON HIS WAY.

ONCE upon a time in the long-ago days of the army it happened that a man listened in unmurmuring, unprotesting silence to grievous accusations laid at his door ; bowed his humbled head ; tendered his resignation and departed forever from the associations of the profession he loved. Within the month that saw his name, by his own act, stricken from the rolls, the men who had been his accusers would have given almost their hopes of promotion could that sacrifice have atoned for and annulled his.

For there were women who had their wits about them, who had ideas of their own as to the victim and the victim's helpmate, and these women never rested until they were in position to prove that the man was innocent. They had labored not because they loved him more, but because they loved her less ; he had accepted and shouldered the sin of his wife. Mack, colonel commanding Fort Minneconjou in the year '97, had known them both. Gridley, subaltern of cavalry, who had known neither, was none the less known to have expressed strenuous

opinions on the subject. Gridley had some history of his own. He was regarded at the post as anything but a "lady's man." Without being a woman-hater, as some women held, he was not a woman-worshiper. He went but seldom in society. He was a man they declared to be dangerous because of his detrimental views, but all the more was he worth conquering for purposes of conversion. The sight of him riding away with the Queen of Silver Hill, as a local enthusiast had once described her, so soon after the most mysterious tragedy Fort Minneconjou had ever known, was a thing to keep every one of their number speculating for hours.

Already they had heard that she had expressed an earnest wish to see and speak with Kitty Belden, and that she had gone ungratified because it was learned that Kitty was ill and confined to her room. "Over-excited," said the doctor. "Overcome," said some of her associates, by the distressing event that had so shocked the entire garrison. Already they had heard, for such news travels swiftly, that telegraphic summons to his stricken mother's side had come to their Adonis, himself stricken and incapable of thought or action. Already they had learned that, while Crabbe lay housed in close arrest and Fox was gone with the wide frontier to choose from, a third person originally connected with the crime

had been replaced in the eye of certain suspicion by still another third as yet unnamed, and Colonel Mack was even then sending forth a little party of mounted men to follow a clue furnished by Lieutenant Gridley.

No sooner was parade over, and the officers scattering to their quarters, than Mack was seen to turn away to the administration building and there, accompanied by the ever faithful Briggs, stood giving some instructions to a sergeant of cavalry who had dismounted to receive them, while his detachment of four remained seated in saddle a dozen yards away. Hundreds of keen eyes all over the post watched that little party as it left the quadrangle and took the back road through the valley of the Minneconjou and over the rolling prairie beyond, bound obviously for that lonely station.

"This mystery is just making *me* down sick," said Mrs. Sparker, a lady lavish in the use of the italic in conversation, "and if it isn't settled by to-morrow night, *I'll* take to *my* bed, *too*. Has *anybody* seen Kitty Belden?"

Nobody in the party at Warren's, at least, had as yet succeeded, though several had called, perhaps in hopes of seeing, but Dr. Warren had been implacable, Mrs. Belden vigilant, and the gentle little patient had escaped the infliction. One girl, two girls, perhaps, she really

wished to see and had so stated to her mother, but the mother counsel had in this case prevailed. "If you see this one or that, how can you refuse to see Flo Cullin or any of these younger married ladies who are so attentively inquisitive?" And Kitty had the sense to see the point and to refrain. Minneconjou had quite made up its mind by sunset of that second day that the child had lost her girlish heart to Mr. Langham, and was prostrated because of his serious condition. It was natural enough. She was at a most impressionable age, and he had been very cordial, very kind and to a certain extent attentive to her—attentive, at least, in the way of letting her ride his horses and even occasionally riding with her himself. Whether the girl was in love with him or not, she had been so shocked and distressed by the details of the murderous assault that it was a mercy to put her to bed and out of the way of prying eyes.

Naturally, too, if Mrs. Belden denied her daughter to her one or two intimates, she would deny her to a comparative stranger whom she neither liked nor trusted, and rest you sure that some of the women, dropping in to inquire how Kitty was, let drop the bit of information that Mrs. Bullard was at the post and that "Mrs. Bullard was hoping to see Kitty and have a talk with her." Mrs. Belden shut her lips when the project was mentioned, and would not

gratify her caller to the extent of giving voice to her views as to Mrs. Bullard and Mrs. Bullard's expressed wish.

"She hung about here as much as three hours," said Mrs. Sparker, "just waiting, I suppose, in hopes that something might occur to bring you out, so then she could ask you to let her see Kitty." And Mrs. Sparker, the one moneyed woman of Fort Minneconjou, was notoriously jealous of Mrs. Bullard, who, with much less cash at her command—for Bullard's allowance was not princely as once had been his gifts—contrived to utterly outshine Mrs. Sparker in the elegance of her toilets.

But even Mrs. Sparker's pointed references evoked no quotable comment. Mrs. Belden had possibly been warned by her husband to let no word escape her as to Mrs. Bullard, for in this crisis of affairs the least harmful in intent might well become a prodigy of accusation. To the chagrin of Mrs. Sparker, the only words vouchsafed by Mrs. Belden were: "Then Mrs. Bullard must have been very late for dinner."

"Oh, she said Mr. Bullard had to go out to a mine this afternoon and wouldn't be back until late at night, and she was too sick at heart to eat. Did you ever *hear* of so—so brazen a woman?"

And even that tentative failed. Mrs. Belden merely

smiled and hoped somebody had given Mrs. Bullard a cup of tea, whereat Mrs. Sparker withdrew, discomfited, and, could she have done so, would have dodged the dames she had so recently left at the Warrens' piazza; but there they were anxiously awaiting her return and eager to hear what Mrs. Belden had to say, and Mrs. Sparker had to face them empty-mouthed and defeated or else to invent, and inventions at Minneconjou paid no better than many at the patent office—it was too easy to trace a statement to its source.

“She just won't say a thing,” said Mrs. Sparker. “Her husband's doing, I suppose. I'd like to see *myself* made a slave of, forbidden to speak or even *think*.” But there were those among her hearers who sometimes wished there were some power to put a stopper on Mrs. Sparker's tongue. Night came down on Minneconjou with no woman the wiser as to Mrs. Bullard's motive in wishing to see Kitty Belden—no woman the wiser as to Gridley's object in securing that ride with Mrs. Bullard alone.

In the gloaming now gathering over the still and far-spreading valley, the forms of the two riders had been gradually lost to view. It was not usual for equestriennes to take the ford road. The longer way round was the shorter way home with dry skirts, for even so

abbreviated and stylish a habit as Mrs. Bullard's would be splashed where the horses plunged through breast deep. Yet the watchers saw that Gridley and his fair and graceful companion had turned from the main road and taken the bridle-path to the southeast. When last visible they were just descending the incline to the bed of the stream, and once there, and beyond the vision of prying eyes at the post, it would seem that they spent some little time, ten minutes, perhaps, for the fresh hoofprints were very numerous when studied in the morning. The horses had evidently stood side by side much of the time, then gone scouting about the edge of the waters and all around a little clump of willows on the farther shore, the clump from which the first shot seemed to have been fired. Then, at long lope or hand gallop, the pair had speeded away to town. At nine o'clock, as was later learned, Mr. Gridley put up the major's favorite steed at the customary stable and disappeared for nearly two hours, then returned, remounted, and galloped back to Minneconjou, meeting Bullard's substantial spring wagon, homeward bound from the Baltimore mine, just at the westward edge of town. Bullard's driver mentioned this the following day. It is doubtful if Bullard knew it, for the night was dark and no greetings had been exchanged.

The Baltimore lay in the heart of the eastward spur of the Sagamore Range, some eighteen miles northwest of town. There were other, many other, mines and some few mining camps and settlements along that pine-crested backbone. There were cattle ranches and a stage station or two in the beautiful valley of the Belle Fourche, thirty miles beyond the range. It was somewhere over in that direction that Fox with Champion was supposed to have gone, and it was believed that from the Belle Fourche he would probably continue his flight northward beyond the breaks of the Heecha Wakpa—beyond Deer's Ears and the Bad Land, until he succeeded in reaching the Northern Pacific somewhere near Medora. Already the telegraph had flashed his description and that of Champion to the Missouri, thence northward to Bismarck, and, long days before Fox could hope to reach the railway many a deputy sheriff would be on watch for him. Even if Fox were not "wanted," the horse was. The fame of the splendid 'cross country hunter and jumper had as yet spread only through western Nebraska and South Dakota and eastern Wyoming, but nine out of ten frontiersmen would see at a glance the fine points in Fox's mount, and though the English pigskin saddle could call forth nothing but derision, the horse would fetch his price in dollars unless acquired by the less

expensive process of disposing summarily of his rider. This could be so readily charged to the Indians.

Settled on their reservations in the Standing Rock, Pine Ridge, and the Rosebud regions, hundreds of eager young braves even now sought occasional opportunity to set forth on hunting expeditions, with or without the consent of the agent, and then it took but little fire-water and less persuasion on part of cowboy or settler to start a row. The Indian on a tear was like a fire at a fort—anything missing could be charged thereto, and there is no point on which the cowboy is more credulous than the culpability of the Indian. Hunting parties from Standing Rock went westward, as a rule, and those from near the Nebraska line northward, giving Silver Hill and Fort Minneconjou a very wide berth. But, once along the head waters of Owl Creek or Grand River the Sioux were on their old stamping grounds and perfectly at home. Ogallalla or Brulé, Uncapapa or Minneconjou, they knew the neighborhood as the cat knows the cellar, and whensoever they saw fit to revisit the scene of their old-time glory, the rancher with a hankering for a neighbor's stock or blood occasionally arose to the opportunity. No frontiersman would suspect a fellow exile of any crime so long as there were Indians loose upon the land.

And, just as luck would have it, not two days before the sudden disappearance of the English groom, a letter had come to Colonel Mack saying that as many as sixty young men from Pine Ridge and Rosebud had recently cut away from the reservations and gone a-hunting beyond the Cheyenne. "Keep a fatherly eye on them, and don't let them get into trouble," said the agent, and Mack promised that he would do so, and had meant to keep his promise when along came "Old Hardtack" to inspect, and then this miserable business about Langham, and between the two Mack forgot all about the Indians and the troop of cavalry he had intended sending into the Owl Creek country by way of keeping the peace. And so it happened that there was no one to oppose any white man religiously and devoutly disposed to stir up a scrimmage with the Sioux, and whisky was abundant on the ranges this bonny month of June. Fox could not have chosen a better time to bring a blooded horse into the Bad Lands—a better time for the native and to the manner born.

Plentiful as were the wild warriors in former days, and numerous as were their descendants now limited to the reservations, only a few of the once noble race of red men could be found about the Minneconjou valley in '97. A dozen half-breeds and half a dozen full-bloods,

who had cast aside the blanket and taken to the cast-off clothing of the white brother, were hangers-on about the station and saloons in town, but contact with civilization had robbed the aborigine of all that was picturesque and much that was proper. He had little left to recommend him. He was not even a voter, wherein he lacked the value of thousands of imported fellow citizens whose very names had been lost and who were designated and known in mining regions far to the east only by number. Lazy, shiftless, yet mildly inoffensive, as a rule, Silver Hill's contingent of semi-civilized Sioux were mainly in evidence at train time in town, and at no time at the fort. Uncle Sam suspected his wards of a propensity to steal, and warned his sentries to warn them away. Beg they could and would wheresoever they saw possibility of return. Work of any kind, save one, they would not. There wasn't one of their number who could be induced to weed garden, chop wood, curry a horse, or carry in coal. But, send him into the hills with a roving commission to hunt for game, or as a runner to look up prospectors, strayed horses, or cattle, and he would face a blizzard to earn a dime. Time was when the snows hauled down Bullard's wires to the Baltimore, the Calumet, and other mining and lumbering camps, and he took to sending John le Gros, Louis Belles Pierres,

and others of that ilk, bearers of dispatches to his weather-bound employees, generally with good results. One thing led to another, to the end that there were three or four of these unsavory Mercuries ever within call of Bullard's office, ready to run his errands to the recesses of the Black Hills in quest either of men or game. They would work in this way because it was congenial, and Bullard would work them in this way because it was cheap. The man said to be worth a million would haggle with a bootblack over the price of a shine.

Now whatever Mrs. Bullard might have thought of a Sioux chief in all the paint, pomp, and panoply of savage war, she had no use whatever for a Sioux servitor in foul-smelling garb. More than once she had been compelled to eject the latter from her kitchen because "cook" invariably took to her heels and fled whimpering to the upper regions whenever Big Thunder or Smites-the-Bear, familiarly known respectively as John and Joe, put in an appearance. Once, it was told at the fort and among her few associates in town, she had actually used a broomstick with telling effect on the shoulders of Smites-the-Bear, who had come in drunk and refused to go forth uncomforted by more whisky. It is never good to smite the red man, even drunk and truculent, for when sobriety returns and reason resumes its sway, he remem-

bers, and his dignity has suffered outrage. Colonel Mack had looked concerned when told of this episode, and Mr. Langham had remonstrated. She said that Mr. Bullard said more and worse things than either the colonel or his subaltern, but without shaking her resolve to renew the lesson should John, Joe, or any one of their set venture to repeat the performance. Mrs. Bullard was a woman of grace and refinement, as has been said, yet one capable of strenuous deed when occasion required. The "Indian, His Uses and Abuses," was one of several topics, it had begun to be rumored, on which she and her husband could not agree at all.

And now, since it has been admitted that Mrs. Bullard could cherish antipathies, it is time to announce that these were not confined to the red men. For reasons of her own, and mainly because she believed him inimical to her, Mrs. Amos had begun to feel a fervent dislike for Lieutenant Jim Gridley. She had owned it, in part, to Langham, but excused it on the ground that she instinctively felt that Gridley had attempted to warn his comrade against her. It was something Langham could not truthfully deny, yet he could and did and promptly, too, assure her it was not Mrs. Bullard whom Gridley disliked, it was Langham's intimacy—no, that is too strong a word—it was Langham's attention to her and her accept-

ance of his attentions that Gridley had so positively assailed. She was more than surprised, therefore, at Gridley's seeking her out to show her attention this long June evening. She was more than surprised, she was startled, when he named the object. What could have prompted him to turn to her as the one woman capable of throwing light on this nearly deadly assault upon his soldier friend and comrade? Mrs. Bullard's head had drooped upon her breast in the effort to hide her pallor. She was startled at his abrupt announcement. This man, who had seemed to avoid and to disapprove of her, now appeared gifted with the power of reading her very thoughts. She knew that what he said was true. She knew there was one woman who had reason to believe in the guilt of some other man than those already suspected. She was not unprepared for the words that followed:

"Mrs. Bullard, I beg your pardon in advance for what I have to say, but say it I must. You believe, and your husband believes, that suspicion must speedily attach to him." She lifted her head with a shiver as of cold, yet the air was still warm, the pace was swift. She turned toward him a face from which all vestige of color had fled, even the soft lips were almost livid. There was agony—horror in her dilated eyes, but there was no denial.

“Bear with me a moment,” he went on. “I know you but slightly. I know him still less, but I saw the look you gave him when the news first reached you, and you best know why you should suspect him. Then I saw his face after you had driven him away. So sure was he that suspicion would attach to him—so terrified, I may say, that he was ready to do anything to avert it. Do you believe Mr. Crabbe lost his Loyal Legion badge in yonder last night?” and he pointed down among the sands about the ford. “Do you not know someone else lost it there—for him?” Again her head was bowed upon her breast. She swayed forward over the pommel, a picture of grief and shame. She could not answer. They had reached the edge of the bank and were winding down the short descent to the broad stream-bed. The willows lay directly opposite, not fifty yards away. He waited until once again they were on level ground, then quietly reached over and took her rein.

“Let us wait here a moment. There is something you should see. We know it was not *his* hand that fired the shot, for he was there—at the dance, but you believe, Mrs. Bullard, and I expect to prove that one of his henchmen did it for him.”

CHAPTER VIII

THE TALE OF THE TELEGRAMS.

ONE of the best trailers in the cavalry was the sergeant sent out by Colonel Mack in charge of the little party just after sunset parade. Long years in Arizona, Wyoming, and Dakota in the old campaigning days had made him master of much that only the Indian is supposed to know. Winsor, his name was, and of him a rival sergeant once had said "he could trail the hind fut of a flea on a marble flure," and Winsor had been chosen at Gridley's suggestion to follow the clue last discovered of all. Gridley had found it among the sands of the Minneconjou half a mile southeast of the post, leading from the rocks near that clump of willows. It appeared again in places about the lonely prairie. It was lost there in the firm, elastic sod, but it was dollars to doughnuts, said Gridley, it would be found again somewhere up the valley, crossing to the north bank and making probably for the mines. It would be dark by the time the party reached that out-of-the-way siding, but watchers at the post saw that Winsor detached two of his men and sent them straight-

way west, up stream along the sandy shores, and the colonel knew what that meant. They were looking for the foot tracks described by Lieutenant Gridley, and both they and the sergeant had with them powerful lanterns.

It was while Mack was still gazing after his scouts that a message came to him from the junior surgeon, Dr. Griscom. Langham was awake, semi-conscious, yet dazed, and it might be well for the colonel to see him at once.

Never stopping to remove his full-dress uniform, Mack went forthwith, found Dr. Warren hastening on the same mission and joined forces with him. "We ought to have some one of his friends with us," said Warren, "and Gridley—er—has gone home with——"

"Yes, I authorized that," said Mack, seeing the doctor balk at what might sound like gossip, "and for good reason, I believe. Now, Briggs is busy. How would Belden do?"

"Best man I know of," was the prompt answer, so Mack shouted "Orderly" over his shoulder, while never checking his stride. The natty soldier on duty came running after and ranged up alongside long enough to receive the message, his white-gloved hand never quitting the salute until he turned. "My compliments to Captain Belden, and say I desire to see him at Langham's quarters at once, and—tell Mrs. Mack I may not be home for

an hour. Lucky we dined this evening before parade," he added, resuming his conversational tone. "Hardt—I mean our inspector, will need nothing but a hand at whist the rest of the evening."

Together they turned in at Langham's gate, many an eye following, even as the orderly rang at Belden's door. As luck would have it, the captain was at that moment seated by the bedside of his beloved "little girl," his pet name always for that only daughter. He had been fondling her hand and telling her the while how many people had been asking for her during the afternoon. "Here's someone else now," he added, rising and going to the hall, a whimsical grin dawning under the big mustache, for Belden, who said so little about the vagaries of his neighbors, saw so very much. A servant had gone to the door, and the orderly's crisp sentences came shooting up the stairway, distinctly audible on the second floor. "The commanding officer's compliments and would like to see the captain at Lootn't Langham's at once."

Belden turned. The instant alarm and new distress in the face he loved went right to his heart. "Don't worry, daughter dear," he murmured, bending over to press his lips to her hot forehead. "I'll send mother to you and you shall know in a few minutes what it means." For answer she threw her arms fondly, clingingly about

his neck and kissed him twice. Then, without a word, released him and turned her face to the wall. Belden met his wife at the front steps. She had seen the orderly from Sparker's window and hastened over. "I wish you would stay with Kitty a little while," he simply said. "I am called to Langham's."

"Is he worse? The colonel has just gone there with Dr. Warren."

"I will send word," he answered, and hurried along.

The light still held, though faintly, and as Belden passed through the front room an attendant drew back the curtain and lifted the shade at the bedroom window to the west. Swathed in bandages, Langham's head lay wearily back upon the pillow, but his eyes, open and alert at last, were uplifted to Warren's genial, bearded face. His hand, long, slim, and almost nerveless, lay in Warren's cordial, sustaining clasp. The colonel had hung back a little. It was best that the doctor should first satisfy himself as to conditions, and apparently the doctor was finding encouragement. At all events, in tone and manner he was giving it to patient and to visitors both.

"Here's Belden, too," he was saying, as the captain entered, and Belden drew near the bed, smiling appropriately, not knowing whether he would be welcome or

not. Langham's pallid features twisted themselves into the ghost of a grin.

"Chair—for the captain, Fox," he feebly spoke, and the attendant quickly shoved one forward, then busied himself back of the patient's range of vision, but Langham had seen.

"Where's Fox?" he queried. "I want some tea."

"Out—riding," answered Warren, with misleading truth; "exercising Champion."

"Champion? Why, he's—sold. Both of 'em."

"Yes, I know," said the doctor hastily, "but not yet called for. How are you feeling—generally?"

"Queer. Logy. What's happened, anyhow?" asked Langham, the big eyes wandering heavily, wonderingly from face to face; all three striving to look lively and sympathetic.

"You had a spill down at the fords. Don't you remember?" answered Warren, his tone still brisk and cordial, but his scrutiny unsparing.

"Fox did," was the answer. "Didn't I tell you? Fox was as full as a—— Where is that infernal rascal, anyhow?" And again the somber eyes lighted up with momentary wrath and eagerness. "He wasn't riding Champion. He was riding a plug from town, and the brute stumbled and rolled and spilled him—served him



"THEN CAME A PLASH FROM THAT CLUMP OF WILLOWS"

jolly well right." Langham passed his free hand over his eyes. Some thought, some dim memory was striving for recognition and utterance. Warren strove to aid.

"Fox wasn't hurt and you were. So was Gordon. Don't you remember?"

"Gordon hurt? How hurt? I guaranteed him sound, wind and limb."

"Wind and limb are all right. Don't worry. It was a shot across the breast that must have stung him like the mischief. Don't you remember, Langham? He must have run and plunged, for you evidently lit on your head—on the rocks, too."

"*I know*," came the answer, with reviving eagerness. "I know. We stopped in the ford—to water. Both horses were drinking. Then came a flash from that clump of willows up on the little point. God, how he jumped! Then two more, close together. I couldn't hold him." And again the hand came up wearily at the shadowy retrospect. "How'd I get home—walk?"

"Carriage," was the sententious answer. "Couldn't you see? Couldn't you hear—anything to give us a clue? It wasn't Fox?"

"Fox? No! Fox wouldn't shoot at me. He ran, though." And almost a chuckle came with this. "Ran for town, I thought."

"Before the other two shots?" asked the colonel, bending forward."

"Oh, how are you, colonel? Pardon my not rising. What's the matter with me, anyhow, doctor?"

"A spill, as I told you, Langham. You'll be all right presently. Only you must be patient and quiet. We won't bother you with any more questions just now. You saw—nobody, then?"

"Not a soul. What time is it? Where was it? Did Grid lug me in? Briggs said I was to take his guard tour this morning."

"Hush, man! It'll be a week before you take anything but rest and treatment. And I want you to go to sleep again—sleep all you can."

"Has the mail come?" And still his eyes followed Warren's every movement.

Mack looked apprehensively toward the little parlor. There on the center table stood a packet of probably a dozen letters. Warren, too, glanced thither, then shook his head menacingly at the post commander. "Nothing but circulars or business letters, Langham. *You* don't care to see them—now."

"Nothing from home?—from mother?" demanded Langham wistfully. "It's four days——"

"Nothing from—mother, at least. The mail's not in

yet to-night, you know. Flyer's late again. You'll have 'em when you wake. I want you to sleep now—and—take this." A brimming teaspoon was held to the pallid lips.

"It's too soon to hear from Billings," persisted Langham, "but mother—she hasn't been well. You haven't let her know about—this?" He suddenly roused again.

"Not a word, lad, but I shall have to be telling unless you can be quiet—and sleep." Warren turned as he spoke and jerked his head in signal to the others. Mack and Belden tip-toed into the parlor, the colonel picking up the packet and hurriedly glancing over the superscriptions. Two letters were from Langham's home and neither was addressed in the singular hand affected then by certain of the smart set—the hand so many of Langham's visitors had learned to know, for almost every day throughout the long, reluctant spring had brought its missive for "Mr. William Pitt Berkely Langham" straight from the mother heart. It was significant, indeed, that now there should be other letters from that distant home—but nothing from her.

"It is useless to question," said Warren, joining them in the parlor. "He knows no more of his assailant than do you or I, and he's not yet strong enough to be bur-

dened with any of the particulars. I'm almost thankful his mother can neither write nor hear."

"He knows, or says, that Fox was not his assailant—that Fox ran at the first shot, or his horse did for him," answered Mack decisively. "Fox is a renegade and horse thief, perhaps, but Blossom barked up the wrong tree. Nor do I feel warranted now in holding Crabbe. My officers are incensed at his arrest, bad as it looked at first. I'm only waiting for Gridley, and news from Winsor, to tell him so. I shall take the sentries off, anyhow."

Belden's fine face brightened at that. Crabbe was no favorite of his, but he loved his regiment and the honor of his cloth. His heart, too, was beating with no kindly feeling for Langham. Fatherlike, he raged in spirit over the thought that his little girl, his darling, had learned to look upon their handsome subaltern with far too favoring eyes, and, fatherlike, he reasoned that this could never have been had not Langham sought to win the fresh, sweet homage of her maiden heart. In public he would have schooled himself to greet the disturber with all the greater show of cordiality. It would never do to let anyone, especially Langham, believe that Kitty cared for him. Yet the father knew she was lying there awake, anxious and impatient for his coming, praying, perhaps, for tidings

of the man who had won, designedly or unwittingly, so precious a place in her regard. Even the prospect of hearing something worth hearing as to the mission of Gridley—the night search of Winsor, was nothing to him in comparison with the pathetic, silent suffering in the little face he loved. There was nothing more he could do at Langham's, thought he, yet the colonel clung to him and wished him to stay, believing, as he did, that Langham would yet speak and might yet say something to throw light upon the subject that engrossed his thoughts. Moreover, Mack had no desire to go home. Mrs. Mack was playing his hand for him at the inspector's game, and he knew "Old Hardtack" would expect him to take it the moment he returned, and "Hardtack" was as exacting a partner as he was an inspector, volubly critical of misplay or inattention, and Mack was in no mood for whist. Belden scribbled a few words to his wife, bidding her tell Kitty that Mr. Langham had been awake, talking rationally, and was evidently on the mend. Other matters were now coming up and the colonel would detain him a while. The colonel's orderly took the note, while the three officers, bidding the attendant warn them if Mr. Langham began talking again, betook themselves to the gathering darkness of the piazza.

It was then nearly nine. Over across the broad level

of the parade the light streamed from the windows and hallways of the roomy barracks. The trill of the piccolo, the tinkle of mandolin and guitar, and the cheery voices of the men came wafting on the soft, southerly breeze. Along the line of piazzas at the officers' quarters the doors stood invitingly open, and many a group was gathered—fair women and brave men—chatting softly over the events of the day. Another dance, informal, would have been on the evening programme, but for the wretched affair that so abruptly ended the hop the bygone night. The band was having an appreciated rest—one that, an unusual thing, it really deserved. Every now and then some young couple would come sauntering down the row, and presently, as it became known that three wise men were seated in earnest and confidential conference on Langham's porch, others, elders, too, took to promenading, and, to Mack's disgust, stopping to ask questions at the gate. He was in the midst of a recital to Warren and the captain of such of Langham's affairs as, without violating sacred confidences, he felt himself impelled to give to them. Interruptions were therefore annoying, and when annoyed Mack was prone to say things not attuned to pious ears. When the fourth couple had stopped and asked the same question Mack opened the batteries of expletive the moment he thought

the disturbers beyond earshot, and wound up by bidding the orderly "Stand there at the gate and anybody that asks about Mr. Langham, say he's better in every way and trying to get to sleep if they'll only let him," then whirled again on Warren and Belden, his silent auditors.

"He showed me the lawyer's letters explaining how mistaken his mother had been as to certain investments, explaining in detail how very much she had lost in the shrinkage of certain securities, and how impossible it would be for her to meet certain payments, including several bills of his, until the next interest was paid; then the tailors and tradesmen, etc., would be settled with in full. But what made it rough on Langham was that the lawyer had promised practically the same thing last November, and there wasn't any interest worth mentioning forthcoming. That's how he happened to be so much and so suddenly, one might say, in debt. It really was no fault of his, and that's why I stood up for him. The thing weighed heavily upon his spirits, and Briggs said he was trying to sell his horses. Now that he's down, I suppose he'll get some more kicks. Then, though I've tried to explain matters to 'Old Hardtack,' I mean—well, we all call him 'Hardtack'——I shoudn't be surprised if he recommended court-martial. It's like him."

An orderly trumpeter, hurrying down the sidewalk,

turned in at Langham's gate and came straightway up the steps. "A telegram for Lootn't Langham, sir," said he, in response to a question.

"Let me have it," said Mack, and then began fingering experimentally at the closed envelope. "It's from his home, I am certain," said Mack, "and perhaps about his mother. He can't see it, can he, doctor?"

Warren gravely shook his head. "Gridley opened one that came this morning," said he, "and looked mighty grave over it, yet told me it was not about the mother—at least about her illness."

"Then this one is more apt to refer to that," said Mack, looking from one to the other of his counselors. He needed to have them suggest opening it, but neither spoke. "It may be late before Gridley returns and perhaps—it has something Langham should know to-night." And still neither officer hazarded a remark. "What say you, Warren? The adjutant general may think it my business to send him—ship him—east if he is too ill to take care of himself. Shouldn't I open this?"

"Possibly," said Warren, though without conviction. Belden held his peace. The attendant came tip-toeing quickly to the door and Warren popped up out of his chair.

"He's talking wildlike, sir; maybe only mumbling

in his sleep," but Warren waited to hear no more. A dozen strides took him to the presence of his patient. There he bent and listened. One moment and up went his hand in imperious gesture, warning the attendant out of the room.

It was nearly half an hour before the doctor reappeared upon the piazza, looking weary. Hypodermics had finally taken effect and Langham was babbling no more. The attendant was once again in his easy rocker by the bedside. The colonel and Belden, reinforced now by Briggs, were awaiting the result when Warren rejoined them. But now the telegram was open in the colonel's hand, and Briggs had brought another. Three grave faces were these that looked solemnly into the doctor's, and the doctor's that returned their gaze was to the full as grave. Mack was the first to speak:

"Any—light on the matter?"

Warren again slowly shook his head. "He was flighty and—talking about other affairs—money affairs."

Mack reflected a moment. "Now let this be distinctly understood," said he presently. "I am acting in this matter as I should want any other man in my place to act toward my son, if I had one situated as is Langham—unable to help himself. I assume we four are all his friends." There was at least no dissent. "I shall go

further and say that, though it may be that Langham has not honored me with his entire confidence, I stand by my faith in his integrity, even though I don't fathom or understand this."

Holding the paper in the stream of light from the hallway he read in undertone:

NEW YORK, 22d.

As your mother's agent, for reasons stated, I must decline to honor drafts.

FORBES WALTON.

The name "Forbes Walton" as signature was strange to all but Mack. "The lawyer I spoke of," said he.

Then the colonel took from the hand of his adjutant the second dispatch. It was already open. This, too, he held to the light and read:

BILLINGS, 22d, 7 P. M.

After full consideration Mr. Shafto feels compelled to decline proposed arrangement.

PYNE.

Warren looked up quickly. "Pyne? Then Murray was right in one way, and the sheriff wrong."

"Yes," said Mack, "but that's of minor consequence. The question is, how am I to help this poor lad now, with Hard—with the inspector general and the adjutant general both insistent? How on earth did he get in such a financial hole? How on earth are we to get him out of it? They say two thousand dollars won't begin to do it."

Warren was silent. He was thinking of the words poor Langham had let fall in the torment of his dreamful sleep or delirium—words that, though broken and disconnected, told a wretched tale, words the doctor could not betray even to these his friends, but that buzzed hatefully in his ears, robbing him that night of hours of sleep, even after his fretful patient had dozed restfully long past twelve—words that other ears, it seemed, had already heard, that other lips had already repeated, and that must soon be known to many another soul, to the end that Warren's professional reticence would be all in vain. "I can't take it. I won't. I wouldn't touch it if it *were* your money, but it's *his*—*his* money, and I'm the last man *he* would help."

Gridley knew of them when at midnight, with sad, stern face he came to his comrade's bedside and looked sorrowfully down upon the sleeping man.

CHAPTER IX

THE TALE OF THE KNIGHT.

A MAN with a history, as has been said, was Lieutenant Jim Gridley, but who at Minneconjou knew that history? So far as his army life was concerned Mr. Gridley had nothing to conceal. Everybody knew that. He was a "ranker," and a good one. He had turned up in a cavalry regiment serving in Arizona in days when Geronimo, with a handful of Apaches, was providing entertainment for a whole brigade. James Gridley was the name he gave the adjutant to whom he applied for enlistment. In physique he was sound and tough as hickory. In character he might be tough, and by no means sound. He "hadn't any character, hadn't any references, didn't know anybody," said the adjutant to his commanding officer, and yet the enlistment had been consummated without delay, for that adjutant knew his business, and thought he knew men. Gridley left some personal luggage in the hands of a hardware and general merchandise shopkeeper in Tucson; was sworn in one evening, and started for the Sierra Madre and the Mexican line the next. Old hands sought to chaff and

new hands to cultivate him. He took everything that came without protest or petulance; gave neither "back talk" nor confidence; stood the wear and tear and hardship of the campaign without turning a hair; surprised the sergeants by the ease with which he mastered the tricks of the trade, and surprised nobody, by the time they got into a real scrimmage with the hidden foe, by his cool, quiet, business-like, matter-of-course courage. The troop, from captain down to boy trumpeter, had learned to look upon him by the end of the fourth month as one of their most reliable men. It was six months before he saw Tucson again. The troop had a celebration in honor of the close of the campaign, a jubilee that resulted in the breaking of much crockery and a few corporals. It was contrary to the tenets of the cavalry to put chevrons on a first-year blouse, but in the case of Trooper Gridley there were but few growlers. He accepted his appointment as he did everything else, without apparent elation or depression. He did what the troop considered a remarkable thing—"set up the beer"—a bulging half barrel brought in refrigerator car to Tucson; invited all hands to partake, and never swallowed so much as a drop. He said he was a teetotaller for the time being, but would never impose his views on those who might differ with him.

He did another thing that tickled the troop. The adjutant offered him a soft berth at regimental headquarters—a clerkship, ease, comfort—no stables, guard, escort, or picket duty—no climbing and thirsting through mountain and desert, and Corporal Gridley begged the adjutant's leave to remain with the troop. More hard work, campaigning, and fighting followed. Gridley got his sergeant's chevrons before he had been a year on the border, and a recommendation for the medal of honor before he had been six months a sergeant. It was a curious thing about that recommendation. Gridley, with three troopers, two of them wounded, whipped off a dozen Apaches and stood a siege of thirty-two hours while conveying a small pack train to the command at the front. He had risked his own life lugging a broken-legged packer into shelter among the rocks. Captain, colonel, and commanding general in the field concurred in the recommendation, but affidavits from witnesses were called for long after, and couldn't be furnished because one had deserted and two were dead. The medal, conferred as a result of that episode, finally appeared on the manly breast of an officer who hadn't been under fire at all, but was fortified with affidavits to prove that he had displayed much zeal in sending relief to the beleaguered party. The cavalry swore; but, being far out on the frontier, could

not successfully compete with candidates at Washington. They couldn't get the medal for their comrade, so they started in with another year to get him a commission, and in this, after one hitch, they succeeded. Sergeant Gridley, being required by his colonel to state whether he had wife or child, wrote: "I have had both. I now have neither."

This "hung up" the nomination a few months longer, but by that time he had in the same matter-of-course way won further and even higher recommendations. It then transpired that his child was dead, that his wife had deserted, that he had heard nothing of or from her for nearly three years, and Sergeant Gridley was ordered up for examination forthwith. It further transpired then and there that he knew more mathematics and history than did some of his examiners. He was commissioned in the infantry; succeeded in effecting a transfer into the cavalry, and before he had entered on his second year as a lieutenant had won an enviable name—that of James the Silent.

And now, the oldest man of his grade in the regiment, if not in the service, he bade fair before long to be known as the wisest. Never telling all that he knew, Jim Gridley knew all that he told. "If Gridley says so, it's settled," was the regimental estimate by the time he got his

first lieutenantcy. They all had faith both in his grit and his integrity, and that said, there was little left to add.

For, as an acquisition to the mess or to garrison society Gridley was a failure. He did not talk, drink, play cards or billiards. He smoked corncob pipes on his own piazza; read some hours every evening; spent many an hour in saddle, and never a cent at the store. He had the simplest outfit imaginable in the way of clothing and household furniture. He had always one suit of uniform, dress and undress, that was in immaculate condition, but he seldom wore it. He could not be lured into semi-feminine games like croquet or tennis, but he was a famous coach at baseball, and the cavalry nine, with Mr. Gridley as captain and shortstop, won enviable distinction in the West, and prizes wherever they went. Women were wont to say this showed his humble origin, but the men, more democratic, thought less of his antecedents than his achievements. There wasn't an officer at Minneconjou, after a few experiences, to lock horns with Gridley in matters of science or history. He was a reader to some purpose. He wasted neither time nor money. Whatever his past, he was making good his present and his future. Even the chaplain, despite the fact that Gridley never went to church or prayer meeting, but was found doing helpful

things among the humble about the post, declared that Gridley had more good in him than doctrine.

Nor had Gridley seemed to "take" at first to Langham. He rarely entered his quarters. He never attended his teas, but they rode together, and explored the range to the north and the rolling divide to the south. Langham was so new to the West that all this was a revelation to him. They were both fine horsemen, though Gridley owned but one charger, a serviceable fellow like himself, and no great beauty. He enjoyed his gallops with Langham, for he loved to watch the magnificent action of Gordon and the lissome grace of his rider. He had been much with Langham before the advent of Mrs. Bullard as a rival, but when that became an established fact, though the rides together became rare, the days in which Gridley did not see and talk with Langham were rarer still. He, who so housed himself with his pipe and book in the long evenings, and whose light burned often until twelve, and who so rarely entered the quarters of comrade officers, now dropped in on Langham almost every night. He seemed to know the very hour at which his new-found friend might be expected home.

And this had been the status of affairs at the opening of our story. The cause of Crabbe and Sparker, Langham-haters both, had never had so staggering a blow as

when Jim Gridley, James the Silent, turned on them with his amazing and most unlooked-for defiance: "My friend spoke the truth, Captain Sparker, and you know it. I'm with him if Mr. Crabbe has anything further to say."

That eventful afternoon troop duties and the inspection occupied much of Gridley's time, but early in the evening he had been again with Langham; had heard with approval that Langham would not attend the dance, and in silence that Langham must meet the belated "Flyer." He knew it could not be to meet Mrs. Bul-lard, for she was here at the post. He had reason to believe it was to meet certain old-time acquaintances and with a view to business, for Langham had told him something of his hopes and plans. He had seen Langham started, and had then gone to his lonely quarters to think and read. It was his detail as officer of the guard for the morrow, but he was temporarily commanding his troop. It would be just like "Old Hardtack" to order the cavalry squadron out for inspection or drill or in field rig before finishing the infantry, and Briggs, for this reason, had agreed to let Langham take his tour. It would be easier doing officer of the guard duty than "trapesing" all day all round afoot on endless drills or exercises. So, even though Langham had to be out half the night, as he said, it would make no great difference as to his duties

for the coming day. Not before twelve did he expect Langham back. He was restless, anxious, worried—gravely worried—about Langham and his various affairs, and finally, having heard running footfalls past the front of the quarters, and what he thought was a faint, distant shout for the corporal of the guard, he finally threw down his Carlyle, took his forage cap and started across the road toward the brilliant lights of the ballroom. He vaguely wished to see how she looked—how she was enjoying herself with Langham away. He saw one or two shadowy forms hastening toward the eastward front, and wondered what was up. He noticed some little commotion on the steps and piazza of the assembly hall. He saw Bullard's agitated face, and then saw and heard her. He turned and ran for the fords, but the carriage passed him by. He reached the scene just as the carriage started back with Langham's senseless head on the doctor's shoulder. He made his way to Langham's quarters, and there, silent, alert, helpful, he spent much of the night at his comrade's bedside, thinking, thinking. He had slept hardly an hour before starting forth on the exploration that had been so pregnant with result. Then came his resolution to carry his theories straight to her—to the woman whose coquetry, folly, vanity, whatsoever it might be, had, as he believed, led

up to the catastrophe. He had gone with her to rebuke, perhaps even to accuse. He had shown her certain footprints in the sands about the willows, footprints that differed perceptibly from the dozen others by which the sands, even on the south bank, were trampled. He had escorted her home; lifted her from saddle, and left her at the portal, and then, with his faculties dazed and bewildered, had galloped back to the post to another night of vigil and harassing thought, marveling much over what he had seen and heard, and cudgeling his brain for explanation.

It had not helped matters that Major Baker was still up and awaiting his return, ostensibly to see that *Ivanhoe* was carefully rubbed down and safely stalled, but mainly to seek for further information. Baker had been growing more miserable with each successive hour, as little by little he felt the conviction gaining ground that his public accusation of Crabbe was indefensible, if, indeed, the suspicion were not utterly unjust. A good soldier, ordinarily, was Baker, and one tenacious of his prerogative as squadron commander. Moreover, he liked and respected Mack, in spite of the fact that the colonel split the squadron in two for parade purposes in order to make his line look symmetrical, or, as some of the troopers would have it, "to beautify his flanks." Baker

couldn't bear Sparker, however, and spoke of him as a snob, and Baker cordially disapproved of Crabbe, whom he declared a sycophant and a mere tool of his captain. Verbal tiffs between them had been frequent and indecisive, for Baker lacked wisdom even as his opponents lacked wit. Mess life at Minneconjou had been disturbed as a consequence, and when at last Baker found himself in possession, as he thought, of tremendous evidence against the junior, at a most critical time he had sprung his trap, remorseless and without thought of his superior—the very thing he would have most resented and rebuked had it happened to himself.

No wonder Baker couldn't sleep and was growing gray and haggard, but the care in his aging face was barely the shadow of what, in surprise and concern, he saw in Gridley's troubled eyes. Without a word Gridley had dismounted; patted Ivanhoe's arching neck, and turned him over to the waiting trooper, then, briefly motioning with Langan's crop toward the open door, followed his senior to the little sitting room, sank upon the nearest barrack chair, and began pulling off Langan's steel spurs. Baker waited, charging a corn-cob pipe the while. He knew Gridley's habit of saying nothing until he was ready. The spurs disposed of, Gridley stood erect; turned up the dimly-burning student lamp, and placed

himself with his back to the mantel, a large photograph of Langham in his latest and nattiest uniform peering over his left shoulder.

For the life of him Baker couldn't help thinking of Mrs. Sparker's reference to the two oddly assorted friends as "Beauty and the Beast." Never a beauty even in his trimmest regimentals, though a forceful picture of a rugged, forceful man, Jim Gridley looked almost uncouth in a civilian sack suit of the fashion of four years back and two sizes too snug for him. It was a "hand-me-down," at best. Gridley said he had no cash to spare on custom-made "cits," and there he stood glaring at Baker from underneath his shaggy eyebrows until the senior grew fidgety and asked:

"Well, what have you found?"

"I've found," said Gridley slowly, "a phenomenon."

"Well—er—how?" said Baker, not quite sure in his mind as to what phenomenon might mean.

"I've found a wise woman where I looked for—a wanton. This is strictly between ourselves."

"How so?"

"I've been blaming her for leading Langham into mischief. She's been trying to lead him out. He refused her aid, or her husband's, despite the fact that it was through her he learned the full extent of his liabilities.

Bills and paper of his have been sent to Bullard's bank for collection. This he knew. What he does not know is that his mother's legal adviser and agent is a damned scoundrel, and that she is desperately ill. He ought to be spinning east of Chicago *now*."

Baker was silent. This was all very interesting, but what was uppermost in his mind, and what, in the selfishness of suffering he thought should be uppermost in Gridley's, was the question, Who waylaid Langham? Gridley had gone forth full of that investigation, full of promise to prove that the miscreant was not Fox, that the roster of the suspected had narrowed to one, and that one Crabbe, or some agent of Crabbe. For what else had Baker lent Ivanhoe? And now Gridley was back, thinking nothing, apparently, about the criminal or of his squadron commander's troubles; thinking only of the victim and the victim's fair friend turned guardian angel. Baker waxed impatient.

"What I hoped you'd have to tell me was something about the—msytery. Something either to clinch it on Crabbe or release him. You're full of Langham's affairs, and I'm naturally full of my own. What can you say about the—assailants?"

"You're right, major. I beg your pardon. I'm somewhat stunned by this accumulation against Langham.

I'm utterly puzzled about the case. I believe I really know less than when I started out. My theory was that some of those hulking half-breeds had been bribed to do this thing. There were others jealous of Langham besides Crabbe, and one, I feared, with far better reason. Those are Indian footprints at the willows and at the prairie station. Winsor's party is trailing them up the valley. The man I thought most ready to do Langham up is the man, it seems, who offered to lift his obligations. Langham refused, believing, I suppose, his mother's agents would honor his paper. Now——"

"Now," said Baker, puffing stolidly at the corncob, "the first thing he's got to face when he comes to, is, practically, that he's a bankrupt."

"Unless some of his friends," answered Gridley wearily, "were to—chip in, you know."

"His friends! What friends has he in that d-delightful regiment in position to help, even if they wanted to?"

"None that I know of," answered Gridley slowly. "A man's best friends are not limited to his own regiment, or are they always found there." Then turning away to the mantel where beamed Langham's handsome face above the trim and becoming uniform, and lapsing unconsciously into the slang of the day, he continued: "But—there are others."

CHAPTER X

A SETTLED SCORE.

HARDTACK'S official visit had come to a close, and with it the colonel's patience. Five days had "Hardtack" spent at and about Minneconjou, the guest of the post commander. Time was in the history of the ante-bellum army of the United States when veteran soldiers who had been at loggerheads ever since the Mexican War were in like manner brought into close social relationship—when men who had exchanged inimical missives, and even hostile shots, were compelled by the exigencies of the service to meet at festive boards, exchange frigid bows and perfunctory compliments—were even, on one memorable occasion, thrown into temporary, yet unavoidable, relations as host and guest. And something still lingered among the seniors in the later-day service of the awful ceremonies necessitated by exalted rank and official station. Something of the chivalric halo that hovered ever about the brow of the old-time soldier, as we juniors were taught to believe, still lived. When Captain This and Dr. That fought their famous impromptu duel on the parade of old Wahsatch,

liberally peppering each other's systems until the linesman fell, did not the doctor instantly, and regardless of his own serious hurts, drop the pistol and the hostilities, and tender professional "first aid to the wounded"? Mack wished in his whimsical way it were possible to pick just such a quarrel with his ever-aggressive, aggravating, and now doubly antagonistic inspector. Mack, too, was an old-timer who had marched and campaigned under Sumner and Harney in the days when dragoon, mounted rifleman, and light trooper—all three—were comprised in the little cavalry force of the army, and coalesced like oil and vinegar. He, too, had seen something of the dying "code" in its last days, and with all his hot heart he wished its resuscitation, if only to have it out with "Hardtack," who had jarred and rasped him in every conceivable way.

But that was not to be. To the very last moment of his stay the inspector general kept up his ceremonious attention to Mrs. Mack, overwhelming that excellent but bewildered woman with the manners of a by-gone day and generation, and even while prodding his host at the desk, in the saddle, on drill, on parade, at the whist table, maintaining scrupulous courtesy of demeanor on all other occasions, and plainly ignoring or calmly suppressing every overt indication of the colonel's rising

wrath. Everybody knew Fort Minneconjou was coming in for a scoring when "Hardtack" got back to headquarters. The garrison was by no means what it should be. But what the mess puzzled over more than a little was why "Hardtack" should spend an entire afternoon over the accounts of the disbursing officers, and so very much time at Bullard's prosperous bank. Potts's papers and vouchers were straight as a string. The post commissary had a clean set of books and stubs, with his cash balancing to the skin of a cent. Captain Grannit, constructing quartermaster in charge of the building of the new cavalry stables, had a goodly balance to his credit at Bullard's, and as many as the astonishing number of seven officers kept their personal accounts there. Over these seven, of course, "Old Hardtack" had no jurisdiction whatever, though, to his fame be it said, he fully believed a government inspector should not only be permitted, but required, to examine into the condition of each officer's private account. "Government ought to know," said he, "just how its employees are fixed financially."

And then it became known that one officer's financial affairs had been made the object of this inspector's scrutiny, and that one was Lieutenant Langham, still incapable of either aiding, explaining, or protesting, still so shaken that the surgeon said he must know nothing about

it for fear of the result. Mack heard of the affair, and the storm in his heart gathered fury. It had not occurred to him that instructions might have come direct from superior headquarters, now informed on the one hand of Langham's crippled condition physically, and on the other of his crippled condition financially. Discussion over the matter waxed warm at the mess. Discussions, by the way, were things forbidden at table, but could not be barred in the billiard and smoking room. Sparker and a limited few of his following sided with "Hardtack," mainly because Baker and his officers to a man were hot against him, and on this point, at least, most of the infantry sided with Baker. Baker held that Bullard's people had no right to reveal the condition of a customer's account. Sparker said a banker who held drafts for collection, and couldn't collect, owed it to his correspondents to bring the delinquent to terms. Bullard had probably felt bound to invoke the aid of the inspector, since it was certain Langham couldn't aid himself, and since it was rumored that Mack wouldn't help the bank.

"If Bullard did anything of the kind," said Baker, "I'll close my account to-morrow, and I'm betting Gridley does likewise."

Where *was* Gridley? Ever since the return of Win-

sor's party, after a twenty-hours' scout for a trail that was lost in the rocks of the upper valley, Gridley had been hovering about Langham's bedside. He had hardly left it night or day, save when needed for troop duty. Now, on this, the last day of "Old Hardtack's" official scourge, he was absent from luncheon, no unusual thing; had been away from Langham's all the afternoon; had the squadron commander's permission to be absent from stables and retreat, and had not appeared at dinner. Mrs. Bullard, driving out to post in the cool of the late afternoon, with a Silver Hill society friend to bear her company, had inquired earnestly how Mr. Langham was doing, and whether she could see Mr. Gridley. She seemed disappointed to learn that the latter was away.

"Hardtack" was to take the east-bound "Overland" at 9 P. M. The officers had formally said adieu after the march past of the men at the close of parade. Dinner at the colonel's had preceded that function, and Mack was fidgeting for the coming of his carriage and the going of his guest, when a telegraph orderly appeared with the exasperating news that the "Overland" had a bad case of hot box beyond the Beaver, and wouldn't be along before eleven. Everything was hot, thought poor Mack, but nothing hotter than his temper. The inspector sighed, and suggested that they might as well go to

whist, and Mack was resigning himself to the dread necessity, when relief hove in sight in the shape of the sheriff. Blossom came loping in at the gate, full of importance and news. "Fox," said he, "has been found in Deadwood, and Champion is traced to the Buffalo outfit. We'll get him yet, meantime what 'll we do with Fox? He's dead broke already—gambled away every cent of the money he got—and was begging a job with a traveling show when our people spotted him. It's God's mercy he didn't go north, with them Brulés and Ogallalas out. How's Mr. Langham?"

"Improving," said Mack shortly. "My dear," this to his wife, "you take my hand at whist. I'm sure you can do better than I to-night, and I'll soon be through with Mr. Blossom. Ah, Sheriff, will you have—er—something before we go over to the office?"

Well, the ride had been long, Mack's Monongahela was a rarity, and the sheriff was not hard to persuade. Together they adjourned to the dining room and thence to the office, the orderly going for Briggs and Belden on the run. Mrs. Bullard's stylish barouche was in front of the Warrens' at the moment, she and her fair fellow-citizen chatting with the doctor and certain of the garrison ladies. All had seen the sheriff's swift entrance and straightaway ride to the colonel's, All were looking for

explanation, when other hoofbeats sounded on the hard roadway at the gate and Jim Gridley came galloping through. Jim Gridley caught sight of the groups along the row, reined in, and, with the obvious purpose of dodging question and observation, turned short to his right and sought the roadway in rear of the quarters, the track of the wood and water carts; sprang from saddle at his own back gate; slipped into his bedroom and out of his "cits"; hastily soused his head and hands in cold water; donned his fatigue dress, and was out and away again before even Baker could reach him. Straightaway to the adjutant's office across the parade he sped. with his long strides, and, almost at the heels of Mack and the sheriff, entered the hall. The colonel's face lighted with eagerness as he turned to greet him:

"Settled?" he asked.

"Settled," said Gridley. "Now, how about Fox? The news of his capture is all over town."

"Taken at Deadwood," answered Blossom shortly. "That damned operator at the station gives everything away."

"It wasn't the operator. I saw a dispatch to Bullard at the bank."

"Have *you* seen Bullard this afternoon?" inquired Blossom, with a curious uplifting of the eyebrows.

"Just left him," answered Gridley, and subsided into a chair, as Captain Belden quietly entered, followed by the adjutant.

"I hope I have not kept you waiting, sir," said the former to the commanding officer. "My daughter is not quite well to-night, and we were with her."

"Not at all, Belden. We have only just come. But I'm sorry to hear this of Kitty. What does Warren say? Is there anything Mrs. Mack can do? She's as fond of Kit—we all are, I guess—as though she were one of our own. Mrs. Mack's playing whist with——" a backward toss of the head—"but she'd far rather be with Kitty." Then he looked up in sudden surprise and embarrassment. There stood "Hardtack" at the door; his footfalls, deadened by the thick coat of matting, had given no warning.

"We gave up our game," said the veteran with frigid and studied calm. "The ladies—ah—were so palpably excited by the tidings that, as others kept coming in and the story had to be retold so often, signals failed to attract attention, and I thought it a mercy to stop the game. Then, being the only man among nearly a dozen women, I—fell back on my supports," and the inspector looked about him in search of a smile.

"You are—most welcome, sir," aloud; "God forgive

me the lie," low, said Mack, as he ceremoniously tendered a chair. "I desire to consult with some of my officers as to this matter of the apprehension of Mr. Langham's a—groom of the chambers, so to speak." Mack, even in his mood of depression and disgust, sought to lighten the situation, especially as the inspector took his seat with an expression of portentous gravity upon his thin-lipped face, and with ominous symptoms of intention to participate in, if not even to preside over, the proceedings. Mack was quick to note it and to resent. "But you, sir, probably, have some matter in mind that should take precedence. If so, we will postpone," said he suggestively.

"Oh, not at all, not at all," was the prompt disclaimer. "I am greatly interested in this affair that has—unfortunately involved Mr. Crabbe, and—in fact, I desire full information upon every phase of the matter. I shall be expected to report upon it immediately upon my return to my station."

There was no help for it then. Like a basilisk there sat the staff officer, his cold, gray eyes dominating the silent and embarrassed council. "Well, Mr. Sheriff," said Mack, baffled and despairing, "tell us all you know, again, for the colonel's benefit." There was comfort at least in that fling, and Blossom, who had only told it four times within the hour, was in no wise reluctant to

again elaborate upon his far-reaching scheme to encompass the rascal Fox. He looked up impatiently, the others in some relief, when the orderly tip-toed in to ask would Lieutenant Gridley step out a minute and speak to a lady. It was the Bullards' barouche that stopped the way. Mack nodded "Aye," and Gridley vanished.

Nor did he speedily return. Fox's coming or going meant little to him now. The grave yet beautiful face that bent toward him in friendly greeting; the winning smile, even though tempered by anxiety; the gentle, modulated voice—these were things rare indeed in his past and bewildering in his present.

"I hope the colonel and you, too, will forgive me, Mr. Gridley," she began, as he lifted his worn forage-cap in grave salutation to both ladies. "I believe you know Mrs. Lawrence." Another grave bow. "We must be going in a moment. Mr. Shannon and Mr. Kirk will escort us, so do not worry as to that, and I have telephoned in to Mr. Bullard. But I thought you ought to know that Mr. Bullard goes East to-night, and that he expects to meet those English gentlemen, Mr. Shafto and his friend, on the train—the ones, you remember, Mr. Langham came to talk with at the station."

"Thank you, Mrs. Bullard," said Gridley. "It was—thoughtful of you."

But she was studying his face. She had been surprised by the tidings when told her at four o'clock. Gridley obviously was not.

"Then—you knew it?" she asked on the impulse of the moment.

"I—had heard it," he replied.

"Then I believe that is all," said she, her fine eyes still studying his face. "Dr. Warren says we may hope for marked improvement in Mr. Langham's case. You will come and see us? Mrs. Lawrence is to be with me a few days. Good-night, Mr. Gridley."

The coachman touched his horses, the officer his cap, and stood gazing after them as the stylish vehicle went bowling away. Once she turned and looked back, but the twilight had faded almost into darkness, and he could not see her face. Nor did he move until the sound of the swift hoofbeats died away far beyond the eastward gate.

Conversation within the office had taken a livelier tone. He had no desire either to hear or to participate. His thoughts were centered here about Langham's fortunes and that woman's face. He was slowly sauntering across the parade when the orderly overtook him with the colonel's compliments, and would the lieutenant be pleased to return?

The atmosphere within the wooden walls was electric as he entered. The storm had been days a-brewing, and was now dangerously near a break. He could hear "Old Hardtack's" icy tones, clear-cut and biting as were the words. He paused one moment at the outer door to gain such information as he could before facing what might be a stirring situation. He had no difficulty hearing. He did not hesitate to bid the orderly remain beyond the gate. What the inspector was saying of the regiment and of its management was not a thing to be heard, and rejoicefully repeated, by the rank and file. Nine-tenths of these in '97 were the colonel's stanch and loyal supporters, but there is ever the little leaven of the vicious and the disaffected. When finally Mr. Gridley stepped quietly to the inner office, the inspector held the floor, had quit his chair and his attitude of scrutiny, and with unusual gesticulation was emphasizing his winged words. But oh, the boiling wrath in the face of the foremost auditor!

"I am not assailing you, Colonel Mack. I recognize your right to stand up for, as you say, the honor of your regiment, but, since you challenge my authority or my rightful—er—prerogative of investigation in the premises, I will say that, in my opinion, the honor of the regiment would have been far better guarded had its com-

mander from the first repressed all extravagance and display on part of—any of its officers, and had he promptly and thoroughly investigated the numerous and damaging complaints that had been lodged against—one of them—instead of striving to conceal them even to the extent of trying to pull the wool over the eyes of the—the authorized representative of the secretary of war.”

Mack’s face was well-nigh purple, but he saw Gridley’s quick signal, the forefinger at the lips, then the hand uplifted, palm to the front, lowered, dropped. He had seen the same sign among the Indians. With magnificent effort he surrounded himself, as it were; gathered himself within the armor, swiftly forged, of repression and reserve. It was full ten seconds before another word was spoken. Then, though his voice shook, his hand shook, the table shook, because thereon he rested his hand, Mack replied:

“ Promptly and thoroughly every charge referred to me *has* been investigated, to the extent that I know more and much more of the merits of this case than you, sir, appear to think. Before a Court of Inquiry, if the President will but accord it, I shall answer the aspersions you have seen fit to make, but this I tell you here and now: There has been no effort whatever to mislead you. I said I had reason to believe that every claim against Mr.

Langham would be met in full—and within the month——”

“And his banker here assures me his Eastern agent has dishonored his drafts and refused him another cent,” unluckily burst in the senior officer.

“In spite of which assurance, sir, I know that every claim has been satisfied. So far as your informants are concerned, Mr. Langham doesn’t owe one cent.”

The inspector turned sharply in his nervous stride and glared at the post commander, who stood shaking at his table, but looking his accuser squarely and straight in the eye. Briggs sat squirming on the settee, downing with infinite difficulty a longing to spring to his feet and shout. Belden, pale and distressed but the moment before, now uplifted his head, his face aglow with sympathy and satisfaction. Blossom, utterly “nonplussed,” clung to the arms of his chair and gazed uneasily about him. Gridley it was who put an end to the suspense of the situation by stepping quietly forward, placing on the desk under the eye of the inspector a flat packet of papers, bowing coolly, and saying: “There are the receipts.” Then he turned and left the room.

CHAPTER XI

LAST SEEN—AT SUNSET.

A WEEK passed by. Langham was beginning to sit up, and all Fort Minneconjou knew that over and above the grievous distress and mishap of the month gone by, there had come to him a poignant sorrow—the news that his fond, devoted mother was no more. Not until his ceaseless inquiries for her letters, and his insistence on telegraphing for tidings of her, warned Warren that further concealment would be damaging, did they finally tell him. Not even now was he allowed to know the purport of the telegrams that had come to him from Billings and from the East. “Rest content that your affairs are in good hands—that there is now no need to act or even to worry,” said Gridley. “Get well; get strong; don’t bother that bedeviled head of yours with business of any kind until you are strong enough to move about, then I’ll talk with you.” And in his grief and weakness of body and soul Langham was fain to comply. For some days he sat in a darkened room, denied to all but the doctor, the nurse, and Gridley.

But he had sent a message to Colonel Mack before he

had been up an entire hour, asking that proceedings of any kind against Mr. Crabbe be dropped—that Crabbe be released from arrest. The step had already been decided upon, but Gridley took his words. Crabbe had resumed duty, silent, but hating Baker almost as he had hated Langham, and seeking opportunity to get square. Those were peppery days at the mess, and Mrs. Sparker was said to have laid her mandate on the captain not to go there, which robbed Crabbe of his most assiduous supporter.

Fox had been brought over from Deadwood and lodged in the county jail. Fox was an aggrieved and injured man. Fox said that 'e'd been drinking a bit, and couldn't manage his 'orse that night, an' the bloomin' brute 'ad run with him when the shooting began, carried him clear to town, where more whisky was to be had, where he soon heard he was suspected of the lieutenant's murder. He feared the soldiers would lynch him. He just rode out near the fort, turned loose the plug, took Champion out when the sentry wasn't looking, and spurred away for safety. They gave him knock-out drops at a ranch near the Belle Fourche. Next thing he knew the stage dumped him out at Deadwood, with Champion gone. Drink did it all, and he begged they would let him see his master and plead his cause. When reminded of his

treachery to that master—his threats to “show him up,” and drive him out of the army, Fox at first stoutly swore he had never “thought of such a thing,” but, when confronted with a crowd of witnesses, gave way to lamentation. “Never again, so ’elp me Gawd, will I touch a drop of spirits—that’s Hamerican made,” said Fox, and meanwhile resigned himself to his cruel fate.

Mrs. Bullard was sending frequently to Langham baskets of choice fruit, delicacies of her own making, helpful little notes and messages. How could the women be kept from knowing it when her manservant came riding or dog-carting almost every day? But Mrs. Bullard herself came not at all. Nor was she seen in town. For nearly a week the lady had secluded herself, with Mrs. Lawrence for sole companion, and Silver Hill and Minneconjou couldn’t understand it. She had even given up the idea of seeing Kitty Belden, though she had sent her, too, fruit and flowers. Kitty herself was buoyantly mending, and had just begun to resume her rides. People are less apt to ask questions of a swift horsewoman or man, and Captain Belden sought to shield his child from the torment of inquiry at the hands of prying neighbors. Her mother, less gentle, but no less schooled in the ways of the world, had given the child much more sharp admonition than Belden would have countenanced

had he known it, and Kitty Belden, as a consequence, had bridged in a single week the broad gulf 'twixt fearless, innocent girlhood and the viewpoint of the maiden, shrinking, wondering, and ashamed. She would never now, she thought, ride townward lest she should meet the lady her mother so disliked. She would not care to ride Champion now, yet could not say why. She could not bear to ride with Flo Cullin, who was always "poky." By the west gate, up the Minneconjou, therefore, she took her lonely way. There were no more riding parties, no more splendid runs behind the hounds. The summer suns had come for good; the days were far too warm.

But riding, solitary, with only a pet hound or two for escort and companion, Kitty could watch and think, and the afternoon of her third gallop, coming suddenly upon a shoulder of bluff that commanded a grand view southward toward the Calumet and the valley of the South Cheyenne, she saw, down among the cottonwoods in a dry fork of the stream, a little party of horsemen moving slowly toward the distant roofs of Silver Hill. The very fact that almost instantly they scattered, five of them scurrying away southeastward toward the abandoned railway station, while two others jogged on stolidly townward, told her they were Indians, for Indians sight every moving object within the limits of

their vision. She watched them until the fleeing five were mere dots upon the distant prairie; took courage from their evident alarm; noted that the flag-staff and the fort were barely six miles away to the east; continued boldly down into the valley; found the trail of the unshod ponies in the sandy bottom, and riding warily, held back until near the browsing herds of the cavalry, guarded by watchful troopers in saddle and sidelined against stampede. Then on she sent her willing pony, overtaking and passing the unkempt, uncouth riders ahead, recognizing instantly two of the dawdling half-breeds she had often seen hanging about the streets or station. "How," "How," they grunted, in the frontier fashion of the Sioux. She longed to make them tell who were these, their friends, who had lashed away at sight of a solitary girl, but well she knew they would only profess ignorance of everything, including her language. She had heard of the venturesome band of young braves out on an Indian lark from the reservation, and marveled at their daring to come so close to Minneconjou. She knew that were the cavalry only mounted and ready, a troop would be sent in instant pursuit, but now it would take half an hour to run the herds back to the stables, there to be hurriedly saddled by their assembling riders. She knew it would be an

hour, at least, before the troop could get away in chase. The wild riders were well nigh out of sight when she left the bluff, five miles up stream; they would be a dozen miles away, with night coming on apace, before pursuit could even be ordered. Still she would tell the herd guard, and excitedly she hailed the veteran sergeant in charge, as she came cantering up the slope. He listened respectfully, with his campaign hat uplifted. Every man knew the captain's bonny daughter. "Five Sioux, sergeant," she cried, "were riding with those half-breeds yonder. I saw them from Bonnet Bluff, coming out of the Dry Fork Valley. They saw me before I could hide. Away they went, full speed, out past the station, and almost out of sight."

"Yes, miss," answered the trooper. "Sheriff Blossom brought in a report of a band seen at two o'clock north-east of his place. Lieutenant Shannon and some of "C" Troop left at once on scout; and, I think, miss, there are others out hunting for you."

"Thank you, sergeant," she answered, her cheeks flushing with the exhilaration of the gallop and the thought of her adventure. "I'll hurry right in that they may know I'm safe." Again she put her pony to his speed, glorying in the exercise, and, reining him in only as she neared the west gate, rode buoyantly on past the

band quarters; turned suddenly to her left at the end of the row and came face to face with Mrs. Bullard, followed by a groom, riding her beautiful thoroughbred and looking the picture of feminine grace and style in saddle. Kitty was trapped. A burning flush swept to her forehead, but her eyes never flinched. She raged in her heart when, as though seeing no symptom of embarrassment, the elder, the accomplished society woman, hailed her joyously, as with practiced hand she whirled Roscoe about and brought him, snorting suspiciously, alongside the panting pony. "Welcome and well met, Miss Kitty. I was just riding out to join the searchers, Did you see anything of them?"

"I saw some Indians," answered the girl, with scant cordiality, and Mrs. Bullard marked, but never seemed to note it.

"The news of their having been seen out to the northeast started quite a commotion. I think your father has gone, with others, in search of you. And there's your mother, so I won't keep you now." Smiling kindly, she raised her ivory whip handle in air in blithe adieu. Then once more, so as not to repass the many sentineled piazzas on the officers' side, turned Roscoe to the west and at gentle canter swept clear round the roadway beyond the broad parade and appeared once more at the

east end of the row and went straightway to Langham's gate, where in waiting stood Lieutenant Gridley—James the Silent, James the society shunner, ready to assist her. Tossing to him her costly whip, with the eyes of half the women of Fort Minneconjou upon her, she freed her left foot from the stirrup, her right knee from the pommel; up went his hands to her slender waist; lightly her fingertips touched his shoulders, and down she came, buoyant as a bird; took his tendered arm and disappeared with him within Langham's doorway, the first woman to be permitted to visit the convalescent since the night of that cruel stroke. Five doors away Kitty Belden had sprung from saddle and stood listening to a torrent of maternal admonition, complaint, and adjuration. Never again must she ride out alone! (Never before had escort been deemed necessary.) Never again must she so worry her father; never again—but presently the attention of both lecturer and audience began to wander; the tongue of the elder woman stopped in stupefaction. They saw Mrs. Bullard dismount and enter Langham's doorway, and Kitty, darting to her room, never heard her mother's virtuous comment flung across the gallery to the adjacent Mrs. Sparker: "Well, what is that woman made of?"

By common consent the duration of Mrs. Bullard's

call exceeded half an hour. By the office clock it did not touch ten minutes. Again they appeared, Gridley and the lady, at Langham's gate, this time in earnest conference. Again he bent, and she bundled into saddle. Again she rode briskly away, bowing graciously to those she happened to pass, gave Roscoe his head the moment she was clear of the gate, and galloped on homeward, with her groom lunging a dozen paces behind, and Jim Gridley gazing after her until the graceful form was hidden from view.

"Why didn't you ask her to stay to dinner and parade?" inquired Mack of his better half, who had watched proceedings from the vantage ground of her high piazza.

"I did," was the reply, "but it's Bullard's first day home from the East—much she cares for that," in undertone "I s'pose she wants to see what new things he brought her—the old fool!" As this sentence, like its predecessor, wound up with an uncomplimentary comment in inaudible tone, it is but fair to assume that Mrs. Mack shared the general opinion that Mrs. Bullard held her husband in but faint esteem, also that Mrs. Mack's husband, whose domestic status was never questioned, had cautioned the lady of his house and name against over expression of her views.

First call for dress parade was ringing over the sun-swept valley as the riders rounded the deep bend of the Minneconjou, where it circled northward between the fort and town, then disappeared from view behind the full fringed crests of the leafy cottonwoods that, springing from the moist and sandy shore of the stream, towered a few yards higher than the "bench" to its left and screened the roadway for another mile. The gate guard had stood watching them, and that was the last seen of Mrs. Bullard for the night—indeed for many a day.

CHAPTER XII

ABDUCTION.

THERE were associates of Amos Bullard, meeting him as he stepped from the "Flyer" that afternoon, who said to each other after seeing him home from his office that "that the old man had aged ten years in ten days." His was a bluff, brusque personality. Prosperity had made him dominant if not domineering. Wealth had been won but slowly at first, then fairly dumped itself into his vaults and coffers. Wealth had brought him influence, power, high position in his community and high credit in financial circles in the East. Wealth had built and furnished and stocked his sumptuous home, and wealth, it was said, had bought its beautiful queen.

Silver Hill had known her three years, much to admire, if also to envy. Whatever it was in her liege lord she saw to honor and to love society could not say. Neither could it say that she had ever failed in rendering every outward homage to the husband who had won her hand if not her heart—never until this last spring, when Mr. Langham came into her life and Roscoe and the

long rides followed. For three years she had appeared in public only with her husband, and his pride in her beauty and grace was something almost inordinate. Marriage had vastly improved him, said society. Marriage had smoothed, softened, and tempered, even if it could not sweeten and refine him. Bullard was too far steeped in commercialism to come to that. Marriage had even seemed to make him content and happy. His head was held so high; his step and bearing were so proud, confident, commanding. Then, along in March, he had begun to grow irritable again. In April, something was hanging heavy on his mind, for he would quit his desk, his dictation, and, abruptly turning from affairs that had hitherto absorbed him, go to the great window and stand for long moments staring gloomily out toward the ornate towers of his home rising there above the roofs and chimneys on the higher bank of the North Fork—the “Dancing Water.” In May, the fits of abstraction and nervousness had increased to a marked degree, and women giggled and men sniggered as they gossiped over the probable cause. In June, they were seldom seen together, his wife and he, and from the night of that calamitous assault on Mr. Langham out at the Minneconjou fords Bullard had seemed a haunted, hunted man. He had made a hurried trip to his mines;

he had kept constantly on the move; he had suddenly gone East—no one as yet knew just how far—and had as suddenly returned, as so many said, “looking ten years older in the last ten days.”

Nor had she been at the station to meet him. Nor was he pleased that certain fellow citizens had there assembled, advised of his coming through an item in the *Morning Chronicle*, dated Chicago the previous evening, to the effect that Amos Bullard, Esq., of Silver Hill, had disposed of certain of his holdings to an English syndicate, of which the Hon. Percy Shafto was representative, and Mr. Bullard was a passenger on the “Flyer” westward bound. Bullard savagely damned the *Chronicle* and its Chicago correspondent, a thing both *Chronicle* and correspondent would only have rejoiced in but for the distressing fact that Mr. Bullard was one of the *Chronicle's* heaviest stockholders. Even his secretary and stenographer had not been informed by wire of his coming. Even his wife learned it through Mrs. Lawrence, who having seen the item in the paper, expressed surprise at finding her friend in saddle and going out to the fort. Mrs. Lawrence said later that Mrs. Bullard opened her eyes wide, looked astonished, but quickly recovered herself and said, “Probably a newspaper conjecture. I think they would have known

it at the office and notified me," then rode calmly on. Who was it had said, "So long as she had Langham she would have no groom, but now——"

Nevertheless, Mrs. Lawrence remembered, as did others who heard the words, the tone, the manner in which this formerly model wife had accosted her husband at the entrance to the assembly room the night of Langham's mysterious misadventure. Then servant folk of Silver Hill had been quoted as telling of stirring controversy between the married pair in the sanctity of their apartment, sometimes in the dead hours of night. All society felt certain that something most serious had happened to destroy the peace and harmony that had existed, and some women went so far as to say that when a woman despised her husband as Mrs. Bullard evidently despised him, it would account for much apparent misbehavior with other men.

George Belden, a gentleman, could almost have throttled his wife had he known that all this, and more, she had been telling to his child.

It must have been somewhere toward 11.45 that night that the telephone bell at the post quartermaster's office began to ring. One of the clerks was supposed at all times, sleeping or waking, to be within summons of that useful, if distracting, instrument. But for long months

it had not been known to chirp at that hour unless there was a dance or late dinner going on, and this time there was neither. There was a girl at the ordnance sergeant's who twisted that clerk round her little finger, and he was wooing while the elders slept. By the merest accident a corporal of the guard going by heard the insistent clamor; went in to wake the supposed sleeper; found him missing; so answered himself. As luck would have it, he was the corporal in charge of the little detachment known as the gate guard, the three men who, with their non-commissioned officer, spent their tour at the little supplementary guard-house at the side of the entrance—the very corporal who, with his comrades, stood gazing after Mrs. Bullard and her groom until they were lost to view beyond the fringe of cottonwoods. This was the only telephone instrument at the post, Uncle Sam declining to furnish his military stations with such commodities, reasoning, perhaps, that news of all kinds flies too fast as it is. Whenever people wished to “talk with town” they invaded the ante-room at the quartermaster's, and by day the thing was buzzing perpetually. Now, town was calling the fort and in the dead of night.

“Hwat's that, mum?” shouted Corporal Haney. “Was Mrs. Bullard here? No, mum. She went

home at retreat. I seen her an' Jennings, myself. Who'm I? Corporal Haney, mum, gate guard. Yes, mum. I *seen* her go'n', watched her out 'f sight. Niver got home? Will I call Loot'nt Gridley. Yes, mum. An' who'll I say? Mrs. Lawrence, mum? Yes, mum, right away. An' he's to call you up, Main 61? Yes, mum." And away went honest Haney on the run, and two minutes later was banging at Gridley's inner door; the outer in midsummer was rarely closed.

Jim Gridley was out of bed and into his boots almost before Haney had finished the half of his message. "Run to stables and have 'em send up my horse at once," said he. "I'll be at the telephone by that time."

It was midnight now, and the post was dark and silent. The twelve o'clock call of the last man of the sentry chain had just gone shrilling on the sweep of the night wind, and Number One in melodious contrast was moaning, "A-a-ll's well." Hooking his blouse as he came springing from his quarters, Gridley took the short cut across the parade, and was whirling the handle of the old-fashioned 'phone before Haney had even roused the stable sergeant of his troop. Central seemed expecting him, for Main 61 answered almost instantly. It was Mrs. Lawrence's voice, and Mrs. Lawrence was agitated. What he gathered was this: That after eleven o'clock

Mrs. Bullard's maid came trembling through the night to Mrs. Lawrence, who lived five squares away. Her mistress had not returned; neither had the groom nor the horses. Mrs. Lawrence vainly strove to assure her there was no cause for alarm. Mrs. Bullard had probably stayed at Minneconjou for a dance, a concert, or something, but the maid said no, she would not stay to dinner or dance in her riding habit. She would never stay so late without telephoning or sending word, and nothing had come. She had tried in vain to ring up the fort, but the fort wouldn't answer. She had tried to find Mr. Bullard, but he wasn't home, nor at the office, nor at the hotel nor club. He had been at home between 5.30 and six. His room and his things were in much confusion, and there were other things Mrs. Lawrence could tell Mr. Gridley personally—she wouldn't, she said, over the 'phone, wherein she was wise. Meantime, could Mr. Gridley advise or suggest anything? Mr. Lawrence was home and would do anything Mr. Gridley said.

What Mr. Gridley said was, "I'll be with you inside an hour," and within five minutes he had written a line to be given the adjutant at reveille, and mounting his astonished and half drowsy steed, was trotting out of the gate. Once well clear of the post he took the gallop and the ford trail to town. It was too dark for scout-

ing. One question he asked the guard: Had Mr. Shannon and his troopers returned? No? Then Indians must have been seen and pursued and driven. Whatever devilment had been planned prompt action had blocked. It wasn't Indians that prevented the lady's return. It wasn't until he reached town and left his mount at the hotel stable that Gridley found a clue.

It was barely one when he rang at the Lawrences' door and was ushered into the sitting room. A tearful maid was still there and the faces of the Lawrences, husband and wife, were very grave. It seemed best that Mrs. Lawrence should tell the story, the maid couldn't without frequent breakdowns. Until the previous winter, she said, Mr. and Mrs. Bullard had been happy. Then Mrs. Bullard got a letter along in February that was shoved under the front door. All her mail came in care of Mr. Bullard. Presently another came in the same way, and finally one addressed to Mr. Bullard, which Mrs. Bullard herself handed him when he came home that night, and there was a terrible scene. More scenes followed, Bullard begging and pleading and Mrs. Bullard refusing. The maid seemed to know more than she could have legitimately learned, and Gridley surmised there had been no little listening at keyholes. Matters went from bad to worse. Mrs. Bullard was

heard in May to tell him if he didn't do something or other before July she would leave him forever, and it was this he was trying to prevent. Early in June he told her he had engaged a groom because he believed it utterly unsafe for her to be riding so far from town alone. She would not have him with her at first, but late one afternoon two half-breeds actually dared accost her on the prairie, demanding money, and sought to detain her. Roscoe easily distanced their ponies, but after that she had to take the groom along or give up riding. None of the servants liked that groom; he put on airs, she said, and would have nothing to do with them. The maid could easily have told more—probably had told more to Mrs. Lawrence, but Gridley had heard quite enough—more than enough. One question he asked: Had she ever tried to see any of the mysterious notes? and the maid, coloring violently and protesting that she hadn't, convinced him that she had. So he asked another: What claim had the woman on Mr. Bullard? The maid bridled, and hadn't said it was a woman that wrote. She gathered as much, however, from what she heard accidentally of the altercation. The woman said she was Mr. Bullard's lawful wife; had lived with him two years, and he treated her shameful and deserted her and her child. She'd been trying for ever so long to find

him. Gridley did not answer this at once. He sat looking intently, strangely, at the mincing, sniffing creature as though he needed to know more, yet it shamed him to ask. He had grown paler, too. Lawrence and his wife both saw that. He finally asked if the maid couldn't describe any of the letters—what they were like—whether they were well written like those of an educated person, or were crude and misspelled. The maid hadn't noticed, and couldn't even say whence they came. They bore no post-mark or stamp. They were slipped under the storm door by someone about town—always in the early evening.

And then there was silence a moment. Mrs. Lawrence was still alarmed and depressed. Her husband shared her sentiments. Gridley was distressed and angered, but not alarmed. Bidding the maid cross the hall and remain in the dining room, he closed the door and faced the couple, to whom until this night he had been almost a stranger.

"There is no occasion for alarm as to her safety," said he. "The explanation is simple. He started out at seven in his big mountain wagon with the four-horse team. He kept that, you know, at the Argenta stable. He has gone to his mines, I haven't a doubt, and taken her with him."

And before guard mount in the morning Mrs. Lawrence 'phoned him confirmation. A brief letter had come at seven, brought in by Mrs. Bullard's groom. It was from Mr. Bullard, his wife being too chilled and fatigued to write. It was to ask her to be so kind as to carefully convey Mrs. Bullard's jewelry, trinkets, valuables, etc., to the bank; to fill a certain trunk with such clothing, etc., as Mrs. Bullard would be apt to need during a ten days' sojourn among the mines and in the hills; to send that also to the bank, and to send Prim, the English maid, to the cashier, with whom she would find two months' wages and notification of no further occasion for her services.

CHAPTER XIII

NUMBER THIRTEEN—GONE.

A SEVEN days' wonder at Minneconjou was that remarkable episode. It was known, of course, all over the post before nightfall. Gridley, who returned white and worn at three, never opened his head on the subject until he saw the commanding officer at nine, and thereafter to only one lady—one little lady—in garrison. But some of the wives and mothers had gone shopping in town and came back full of it. Mrs. Lawrence had been boarded and carried by storm. Prim, the lachrymose, had told her sorrowful tale to dozens of listening ears, and by noon it was the current belief that the banker had borne his wife to the wilds of the hills solely to keep her from running away, presumably with another man. Indeed it was from Prim that Mrs. Sparker and Mrs. Belden first heard the news, and, forgetting their shopping, they went at once in search of Mrs. Lawrence to tender merely sympathy and suggestion, of course, but incidentally their services in collecting and storing Mrs. Bullard's many beautiful gems, and in packing that trunk; for Prim, having received her dismissal,

could not be expected, even had she been desired, to aid Mrs. Lawrence in the work.

And such a time as had Mrs. Lawrence at the hands of such expert examiners as were these two gifted leaders! and such a time as might have had Jim Gridley, had not his grim jaws set squarely and refused to budge! As much as was possible he secluded himself throughout Minneconjou's waking hours with his convalescing neighbor Langham—now no longer a "center" or barely an "outer" in public interest.

Yet Jim Gridley, who had gone to bed at 3.30, was out again at five, refreshed by a cold shower and inspired with new ideas. Stopping at the troop kitchen for a big cup of soldier coffee, he supervised reveille roll-call; reported to the post adjutant and strode away to the stables, where the herds were just being turned out to browse for an hour on the dew-laden bunch grass; called for a horse; mounted and cantered away to the cottonwood grove a mile or so down stream. Just as he thought, unshod hoofs had made many a print in the yielding sand. Three ponies had been tethered under one tree as much as an hour. Moccasined feet had meandered hither and yon and had been planted shiftily in juxtaposition with some white brother's boots, for these latter had come down the bank from the beaten road-

way; had clambered again to the crest, where a four-horse spring wagon, capable of a shorter turn than were those of government make, had gone about and, still screened by the foilage from view of the fort, had with clamping brakes coasted down a side track to the soft, sandy bottom, and there, out of sight from the main road but in view of the saddle track on the right bank, had stood a few moments waiting for something or somebody. Two shod horses and three shoeless ponies had come bunched, struggling, plunging down the steep. There had been a prodigious splutter close to the wagon, then a scatter. The wagon had first gone toward the North Fork over the prairie until it struck the Sagamore road. The shod horses had followed—one of them, as Gridley could tell, practically towed by the other. One pony had followed the Minneconjou eastward toward town; two had gone eastward until within half a mile of the fort, then out over the rolling uplands to the south. It was as plain as a pikestaff to a trailer like Gridley. Bullard, the mighty, had waylaid and abducted his own wife.

Then, with gloom in his eyes, the lieutenant returning questioned Corporal Haney's three watchers at the gate. Their relief was already paraded and ready for guard mounting. Yes, Private Nevins of Company "G," on

post during evening parade, had just dimly seen what looked to be the canvas cover of a Concord wagon driving over the distant flats, soon after gunfire. In these long June days, and high latitudes, it was late when the sun went to rest. It must have been eight o'clock or after when Nevins saw the wagon top. It was after seven when Mrs. Bullard rode away. Jim Gridley's big heart sickened at the thought, but she had not easily succumbed; there must have been a desperate struggle. Gridley's teeth set like a vise and his breath came in gasps at the mental picture—that gently nurtured girl, as still she seemed to him, in the hands of those unspeakable brutes.

When Mrs. Lawrence's letter came, telling him that Jennings had returned bearing Bullard's mandate and bringing the horses, Gridley's first impulse was to gallop again to town and throttle that groom. Something, he could not say what, compelled belief that the fellow was the master's tool, sought, hired, and probably well paid for his work. But before he could get ready came word by telephone. The groom had gone again. He had been to the bank; had seen Bullard's confidential clerk; had returned; packed a valise; pitched it into the dogcart and driven away. There was no one to question his authority. At noon two of Shannon's men, coming in with played-out horses, said that as they crossed the

Sagamore road near Blossom's ranch they saw the dogcart driving toward the mines—the man probably was gone to join the master.

But Gridley would leave no stone unturned that gave promise of further discovery. He had gone dutifully to Major Baker and with him to the colonel and told what had been ascertained as to the affair at the cottonwoods and something of what he had heard in town. Mack and Belden, who were closeted together, told him in return of Kitty's scrutiny of the two half-breeds she had passed in the late afternoon, just as the herds were coming in, and Gridley asked Belden if he might speak with her. This was while Mrs. Belden was still in town. Belden said surely, and went with him to the home. Kitty was at her morning studies—lessons planned and supervised solely by her father—but she came at once at his call and put her hand shyly, trustfully in that of James the Silent. She liked him for his loyalty to Mr. Langham, even though she must no longer like Langham. Of course she could describe the half-breeds. She had followed them nearly five miles and taken a good look when she finally passed. One was round and fat, with a greasy look to his brown face. He wore his hair "bead-braided" on each side of the front and hanging low at the back. He wore a shabby old felt hat and

shabby clothes—a blue flannel shirt under an old black silk waistcoat, old gray trousers, somebody's castaways, and Indian leggings, "like those the Shoshones make, tied with buckskin thongs." He had a Henry rifle, a quirt, and his pony was a wall-eyed pinto, with an old ranch bridle and saddle. The other was a younger fellow, with keen, sharp face. "What color was the pinto's tail?—Why, gray or a dirty white." "Like this?" asked Gridley, unreeling from his left forefinger a long strand of coarse hair. "Exactly," said Kitty. "The other pony was a claybank, with hardly any mane and tail—a scrawny little brute."

And then Jim Gridley sent the blood surging to Kitty's very brows by lifting her slender hand to his lips and bowing over it with most unlooked-for grace, and saying: "Little lady, you deserve to be chief of scouts." Then he turned to her father. "It's John le Gros, beyond a doubt, with that cub of a nephew of his, and they were at the Argenta stable when Bullard ordered his team and wagon, somewhere about six. Then they disappeared. He hired those beggars—again."

That little conference led to unexpected results. There sprang up a confidence between the bonny, winsome army girl, and that girm, taciturn, somewhat elderly lieutenant—a confidence upon which Belden smiled approval, and

Mrs. Belden lavished astringent comment. They were seen on the following day visiting Gordon in his lonely stall, condoling with him on the prolonged absence of Champion, his stable mate, and pityingly examining his healing wound. McCrew, the veterinarian, gave it as his opinion that it would leave an ugly scar across that beautiful, glossy breast, and Gordon himself seemed to be much that way of thinking, for he had contracted a habit of cocking up his ears, arching his neck and trying to see for himself. Nor had he been at all pleased that anyone should touch or dress it. Yet he never winced at the touch of Kitty's cool, slender fingers. McCrew was presently of opinion that it would do Gordon good to be out for air and exercise. Matters at Minneconjou had begun to stagnate. Mrs. Bullard, with her liege lord, was reported "up the range" at Bullard's remotest camp. "Entire rest and change of scene and air," had been prescribed, wrote Bullard to the bank. Mr. Langham was slowly mending physically, but had displayed a reprehensible indifference to such feminine consolations as had thus far been tendered. From the night of the assault up to the fifth day following the probably involuntary and possibly forcefully accomplished exit of Mrs. Bullard from the scene, only two women had been admitted to his presence: Mrs. Bullard

herself just once, and Mrs. Warren, wife of the senior surgeon, just twice. There were others who suggested coming whom the convalescent did not seem to care to see. There were others whom even in his deep despond he would have welcomed, who did not seem to care to come. There were home-keeping, home-loving gentlewomen among the dozen army wives at Minneconjou—women who had enjoyed Langham's teas and Langham's calls, but who shrank from what they feared might seem intrusion, and let their sympathies exude only in the shape of comforts and "kind inquiries." Langham's nurse lived high on the jellies, ices, whipped creams, etc., that came in such profusion, but the intended beneficiary sat languid, inert, and sorrowing. It was obvious that he was in heart and hope a sorely stricken man.

Then Gridley was riding out a great deal just now, spending some hours each evening in town, following some strange bent that had seized him and spurred him to almost feverish activity. Mack had come and had a conference—a long one—with his invalid and sorrowing subaltern, and had gone with eyes suspiciously moist. Other officers—many—had called and left their cards. Letters and certain telegrams had been received from the far East. Warren had said that, physically, Mr. Langham would speedily be well enough to travel, if not

to resume duty. Mentally it might be months before he would be himself again. Briggs had a long talk with Langham, and he, too, had come forth looking almost lachrymose, but, to the mingled despair and exasperation of his wife, "with those jaws of his clamped shut tighter than ever." Some important paper signed by Langham, after a long conference in which the colonel, adjutant, surgeon, and Gridley had taken part, had been forwarded, sealed, to department headquarters, and no clerk had seen the missive. Mr. Briggs had personally briefed and then endorsed it for the colonel's signature, but the colonel's pencil memorandum for that endorsement had been torn into minute fragments and cast to the winds. A space in the endorsement-book, ink-lined off, showed the date of the communication, the name and rank of writer, but both purport and copy of endorsement were yet to be recorded. This was rough on the clerks.

Then one wonderful day Gridley came riding out from town, followed by a trooper uncomfortably bobbing on Langham's English saddle girthed snugly to Champion, restored in one sense, but by no means in all; for the rough life of the range, no grooming, no sifted, sorted oats, no equine luxuries of any kind, followed by a jolting railway ride of over one hundred miles, had told upon his

spirits. The reunited steeds, however, neighed rapturously as the stable door was opened and then nuzzled each other over the plank partition. And Kitty Belden surveyed the scene from the back of her shaggy pony and went in to pat them both, and then came walking thoughtfully away, James the Silent towering beside her.

"Pardon me for asking you this, Miss Kitty," he began abruptly, "but was it your mother or your father who disapproved your riding Gordon?"

"It was mother. She did not wish father to know."

"To know I had asked you to ride him?"

"Yes," said Kitty.

There was silence a moment. "The pony is too small for you now," said he, as they neared the gateway at the rear of the line of quarters. "And you rode Champion so well. He or Gordon, either, would now be the better for your riding him. I think—I'll speak to your father."

"I wish," said Kitty, "you would."

There was something Gridley wished to ascertain and Belden, if he knew, would not be apt to tell, and Mrs. Belden, if Gridley knew her, would be only too glad to, so Gridley took the first opportunity of speaking to that lady, and he had not long to wait. She was seated on the

piazza as he came forth attired for dress parade, all blue and buttons, gilt and glaring yellow. It was not yet time to join his men. He turned squarely to the right, marched straight into Belden's gateway and, bowing civilly to the astonished lady, said: "Mrs. Belden, I have asked Miss Kitty to ride Gordon or Champion every day. I infer you have objection. Is it so?"

"Why—yes, Mr. Gridley—since you ask, I have."

"Any other objection than that you did not wish her to ride Mr. Langham's horses?" And now this most unconventional and untamable savage had the audacity to stand looking unblushing into her indignant face.

"I never told—her—why I objected," replied the lady, with rising color.

"You never had to, perhaps. But, is there?" he insisted.

"I think that one objection quite enough, Mr. Gridley," said she severely.

"Then forget it, Mrs. Belden," said he, "The horses are not Mr. Langham's, but mine."

Before she could recover, out came the captain, garbed likewise for parade, and before he could speak Gridley had spoken:

"We've been talking horse, captain. I've asked Miss Kitty to ride Gordon, and Champion, too, when he's in

trim again. Mrs. Belden has no objection now. I hope you approve."

"It is kind of you, Gridley," said Belden guardedly. "I'm aware Kitty has rather outgrown pony. And it's very kind of Langham."

"Langham always said, and so does the colonel, that Miss Kitty rides better than any of us. I'm glad it's settled. Good-evening." And lifting his plumed helmet—the fashion of the American land service in such matters being contrary to that of the European—or of the sea—Mr. Gridley stalked away.

"Did you hear what he said—that the horses were his?" demanded Mrs. Belden, while her husband stood gazing thoughtfully after the tall, spare, sinewy form.

"I did, but—— Ah, good *evening*, Mrs. Sparker." This to the lady just issuing from the adjacent doorway, and Mrs. Belden had to wait.

It was a sight worth seeing. Kitty Belden in her jaunty, trim-fitting habit, guiding Gordon into garrison the following day, sitting him like a queen, controlling his springy, spirited movements with the lightest touch of the curb, with the clear, soothing tone of her voice. Forth from Langham's doorway to meet her came Mr. Gridley, who stood at Gordon's head and stroked his glossy neck and looked up in her beaming, beautiful,

happy face and smiled his grim, humorous smile; then ducked his head over his shoulder toward the door. And there, very pale, very languid still, supported by the attendant on one side and a stout cane on the other, there stood Mr. Langham, and in loose-fitting, cool, civilian dress Mr. Langham came slowly forward, a gleam of sunshine in his sad and sallow face. The color rushed to her brows; the light flashed in her eyes. They met at the little gateway, a dozen people seeing and scarcely believing. The thin white hand went up to meet and be welcomed by the warm little gauntlet, and Gridley held Gordon by the bit and sought to moderate the transports with which he was pawing up the gravel of the sidewalk, but no one came to chide. And all that evening Kitty Belden hovered about her father, far too blissful for words, yet telling herself and him it was all because of Gordon.

Two days later she was standing in front of Langham's gate, having just dismounted after a glorious and exhilarating gallop. Gordon was dancing and sidling away to his stable, almost lifting his groom along with him, as he clung to the bit with both hands. The groom was a trooper and "twice the heft of Fox," said the men who looked laughingly on, but he hadn't Fox's "horse sense" and both horses knew it. Gridley, who had whimsi-

cally asked her to dismount there and escort him to her father's door, he being their guest at dinner, left her for a moment with Langham, while he went within on some specious plea. She was growing quite tall for such a slip of a girl of sixteen, and in her habit, with its straight military collar, cut high and very like that of Langham's own Gotham-made uniform, she looked her years, a matter that gave her keen delight and her mother much dismay. In love and loyalty to her father's corps and regiment, she had obtained tiny crossed rifles in gilt and had herself stitched them to the collar, but between them and the hooked edges at the front were two vacant spaces, and she saw that he had remarked it.

"The letters are coming," she was saying, as Gridley turned away. "I didn't quite like those at the exchange."

"Yes," answered Langham thoughtfully. "It should be complete, and I hope you may wear them many a year and—ride my old pets regularly. It is to be Champion to-morrow, is it not?"

"Yes, Mr. Langham." She was looking at him wistfully, wondering that he should still speak as though he might not ride for many a day. He seemed so very sad and grave, yet he was surely better and stronger. He needed no attendant now. He had been taken to drive

that very afternoon. There was something she so much wanted to say to him, yet the words would not come, and Gridley did, and she had to go with him, and to bid Langham good-night.

The Beldens were "dining" several people that evening, one of those garrison functions that cannot well be avoided, yet might be abolished. Mrs. Belden had insisted that their social debts be paid, even if it had to be done piecemeal. This was the third since Easter and was to be the last, and Belden stood sturdily to it that Gridley should be bidden and Mrs. Belden sighed and obeyed. Kitty, though sixteen, had never yet been included on such occasions, Mrs. Belden clinging to the last to her youth and illusions. Kitty was to take tea at the Warrens', to the great joy of the youngsters. It was after ten when she came home and all save Gridley were at cards. He had been "sent for," said her mother sharply. At eleven, when her guests were gone and the lady of the house came wearily aloft, she stopped as usual at Kitty's little white bed to kiss her daughter good-night. "I never saw anyone so solemn and dull and poky as that owl Gridley," said she. "But your father would have him. It was like lifting a wet blanket when he was called away. *Why* was he sent for? Do you know?"



"THE LID FLEW OPEN AT HER TOUCH"

Kitty did not know. She rode as usual next afternoon, and came home around by the east gate that Mr. Langham might again see how fine Champion looked, but the door was closed. Neither Gridley nor Langham appeared, and wondering and a little hurt and much disappointed, she rode on, passing through the lane to the rear of the quarters, and there dismounting and scurrying to her room. A little packet lay on her dressing table, addressed to her in Langham's hand. Wondering more she tore it open and a card dropped out—his card, with these words written on the back:

Wear them whenever you ride and don't let Gordon quite forget.
W. P. B. L.

Quickly she tore away the tissue paper. A little jewel box appeared; the lid flew open at her touch, and there, on their dark blue velvet cushion, were the twin block letter collar devices, each U. S. and its fastening in solid gold—the very ornaments he had always worn on his fatigue uniform. Bewildered, troubled, she looked about her. A quick footfall was on the stairs; a moment, and her father stood at the door. He was just from drill and drawing off his gloves. Without a word she held her prize out to him with the little card. He read:

“Yes, poor Langham,” he slowly said. “His resig-

nation was accepted by wire last night. Gridley has gone with him."

"Resigned! Gone!" she cried. "Oh—oh, Daddy!"

He sprang to and shut the door. Then, with one sob, "My own little girl, I ought to have known," caught her in his arms.

CHAPTER XIV.

A NEW ARREST.

IT seems that the manner of Langham's going had been planned by Gridley and approved by Colonel Mack. Gridley, granted seven days' leave, was to accompany him all the way to the Atlantic seaboard. Gridley's leave was to be extended thirty days or three months if he wished—it was the first he had ever taken. Langham's belongings were left in charge of the adjutant, some to be distributed at the post, some to be packed and sent after him, some to be sold in town, but Langham was still too feeble, physically, and far too sad to stand the strain of saying good-by. The matter of his resignation had been discussed in full by Mack and Gridley and Briggs, and though opposed at first by the colonel and his adjutant, was finally and fully approved. The death of Mrs. Langham had been followed by the announcement that her affairs were found in strange confusion, and though she who was known to have possessed abundant means, had died, so said her trusted agent and business manager, almost penniless. Asked for explanation, the agent, a gifted and brilliant lawyer,

declared that of late years Mrs. Langham had developed an insatiable mania for speculation, and against his advice and entreaty had, one after another, sold out her securities and investments for cash with which to meet the demands of her brokers. Who were her brokers? The agent did not know. But speedily again it was rumored that there were few brokers that did not know her agent—a man so widely esteemed and respected that in many a will he had been named as trustee for the widow and the fatherless, in many a noble charity he had been chosen treasurer, and at least in one church and Sunday school he had long stood as pillar, leader, and financial adviser. A charming home, a lovely family, had he. A blameless, beautiful life led he so far as the church and society knew; but there were hard-headed, graceless, Godless, sordid men of mammon irreverent enough to say that the piety of this particular pillar was not even skin deep, and that the kith and kin of other widows would be wise to investigate him. Then it was found that the gentleman had sudden business in Montreal, but all should be open to his impertinent and importunate investigators on his return, the following week. (That return was only compassed long months after by way of Central America and extradition proceedings, after which came the statutory sojourn at Sing

Sing. But this is anticipating.) Old friends of Langham's father and mother had levied on certain of the "savings" of the self-exiled, and Langham was needed in person.

Here lay, then, the sorrowful secret—the skeleton in the family closet that for long months had worried Pitt Langham to the verge of nervous prostration. His poor mother's faith in her adviser and business manager, her husband's old familiar friend, had been childlike and implicit. Pitt himself, until toward the last, had never suspected him, and now he was gone, a fugitive from justice, and the church and Sunday school, pious and proper Society, and robbed and defrauded women and children by scores were mourning his downfall.

It was hard on Langham. He loved his profession. He had come with high hope and resolve to his new regiment, and now within six months had found it necessary to abandon all. The little reported left of his mother's estate would not begin to cover his debts, her debts, and provide for the regular payment of certain sums to certain dependents and kindred of the father so long in his grave. His will had left this duty to her and, after her, to the son, and ample means from which to make the payments. There had been good reason for so devising instead of willing a lump sum

to each, and now the bereft were clamoring for their quarterly stipend. Energy and good management might enable the son to recover sufficient to meet all these just claims, but he must quit the army and take up the burden. Even Mack and Briggs saw that Gridley was right when Gridley said it was the only thing for Langham to do.

And so without a word to anyone he was gone, and Fort Minneconjou was to know him no more. About the only message left was to Kitty Belden, but this came through Gridley. Gordon and Champion were hers to care for and exercise until Gridley should return; his soldier groom was so instructed and Baker had promised to see that the soldier did his duty.

Baker still presided at the bachelors' mess, where Sparker showed less frequently and where Crabbe quite regularly appeared in his usual place. A species of truce had been patched up by disinterested associates of Baker and the aggrieved lieutenant. Baker expressed his regret at having harbored unjust, if not unjustifiable, suspicions, and having made an unwarrantable charge. This Crabbe somewhat awkwardly accepted. Crabbe took the seat on the major's left at dinner that day, and the two conversed with obvious effort, and thereafter greeted each other with much solemnity of mien, for there was no bridging over

the antipathy. Baker still deemed Crabbe a sneak, and Crabbe thought Baker a snob. Neither could or would as yet hazard a reasonable theory as to how the Loyal Legion insignia happened to be found at the fords. In his innermost soul Crabbe believed that Baker had picked it up in the dressing room and, instead of restoring it, had carried it to and hidden it there, and then "found it" in the sands of the Minneconjou. He knew that in this belief he would stand alone. Of Langham they did not speak at all. His name was often mentioned in low-toned chat, in little groups of two or three, but seldom referred to, and then only with constraint, in open mess or meeting. It was conceded that he had "done the only thing proper under the circumstances," but there were still varying theories as to the real cause of his going—Crabbe and one or two fellow mental molluscs preferring to believe that it was to escape court-martial and disgrace. But Crabbe was now a hopeful candidate for the adjutancy, vice Briggs, slated for promotion. Crabbe held that the colonel was bound to appoint him, if only to make partial amends for his recent arrest and humiliation, and therefore Crabbe could not safely say what he so surely thought. Aspirants for the adjutancy should of all things learn self-repression.

Tongues were loosened a bit by Gridley's absence,

though there were still Baker, Field, and Shannon to be considered in case any fellow felt tempted to say satirical things, and some few fellows so felt. Everybody knew by this time that it was Gridley who had stepped in and taken up every one of Langham's drafts, notes, or bills presented for collection through Bullard's bank. Everybody knew that his economy or parsimony, as some called it, had enabled him to save quite a section of his pay. Baker knew that he had made judicious investments, and several knew that he had a little balance to his credit at Bullard's and a bigger one somewhere else. And now, with Langham, he was gone to the far East and might not be back for a month. "His troop will miss him," said Baker, "and so shall I."

One question not asked aloud, either at mess or along the row, was none the less whispered in many a confidential chat about the post. It was an open question in town. Was not Mrs. Bullard aware of Langham's prospective eastward flitting? And this question had led to others. If so, was it not to join him that she had threatened to leave? Was it not to prevent her going with Langham that Bullard had forcibly borne his wife away to the mines? Women, as well as women in the garb of men, wished they could interview that injured young person Prim, the English lady's maid. It was a pity

that she had been allowed to get away before revealing what she knew, but Prim had shaken the dust of Silver Hill from her straining shoe leather and departed. Bullard's clerk had engaged her berth and seen her started for Chicago. Two months' wages, it was said, represented but a moiety of what she carried and what stood charged to Bullard's personal account.

Then there was another matter Silver Hill and Minneconjou both had pondered over not a little. That Indian scare had "petered out" in such a feeble fashion. As many as two score and ten young braves had been out hunting, said their friends—had been seen as far over as the Belle Fourche; had been scouting the ranches and ranges, even as far as Crow Creek. But all on a sudden they had scurried for home before levying tribute or committing depredation of any kind. All on a sudden, as has been said, they had got wind of something that sent them to the right about, one band, the Brulés presumably, had in wide circuit passed east of Silver Hill, Shan-non's little party in hot pursuit. Another, the Ogallallas these, had broken through the spur of the Sagamore northwest of the fort and taken the shortest way back to their bailiwick. Now, no sooner had it been whispered that "the reds are out" than all save the most decrepit of the loafing half-breeds about Silver Hill had taken

flight. Two of these, Le Gros and P't'i Loup, his guileless nephew, came into town one evening just long enough to have some brief talk with Bullard; then out they had gone again, and it was remembered that the day the raid was first reported, and cowboys and settlers came spurring in to say there were dozens of "reds" in the upper valley, Bullard had sent at once for Le Gros and Loup, and, after ten minutes' talk behind closed doors, together the two had galloped away to the northward. Now they could not be found at all, and rumor connected them in some way with the sudden panic that drove the Indians back to their lodges and the startling abduction that sent Mrs. Bullard, an unwilling prisoner, away to the wilds, her husband in charge. From Mrs. Bullard, even to her friend Mrs. Lawrence, not a word or line had come direct. To Mrs. Bullard, both Mrs. Lawrence and Mr. Gridley had written urgently, but they doubted much that the missives would ever be allowed to reach her.

One other thing had happened about this time that gave new fuel to the flame of talk. Fox, the abductor of Champion and the would-be slayer of his master, had actually been released from custody, and this, it was said, on Langham's motion, as Langham declared he would never prosecute him. Fox had been his

mother's "tiger" in days when she drove her basket phaeton, with her beloved boy seated by her side. Blossom swore magnificently when notified of Langham's decision, but all the blasphemy in his vocabulary, which was profuse, could avail nothing now. Fox was free, and, it was reported, was gone to Chicago for the summer horse show. The station agent said he was aboard a train within an hour of his release from durance, everything evidently having been planned before. Now this was treating an interested community more than shabbily, yet even the *Chronicle*, Bullard's presumed organ and possession, made no adverse comment. Within the scope of a single week every man and almost every woman who *knew* anything definite of Mrs. Bullard, of her occasional meetings in town or afield with Mr. Langham, had taken wings and leave of Silver Hill. Prim, Jennings, Fox, Jean le Gross, and P't'i Loup all were gone, the half-breeds had followed the full-bloods. It was rumored there was famous gambling in full blast at the reservation. And this was the situation along and about the Minneconjou Valley some days after Langham left and when the next sensation came.

July was then a week old. It was Kitty Belden's birthday. The Macks were giving a dinner in her honor. Seventeen years had she lived now under the shadow

of the flag and within the sentry lines of the 2—th. Mrs. Mack had abated not one jot her genuine and loyal affection for this winsome daughter of the regiment, though her impecunious guests and kindred, the Cullins, were less enthusiastic—Flo, because her somewhat gushing temperament found no response in Kitty's deeper nature and maidenly reserve; Mrs. Cullin because her motherly heart went sore over the fact that her prosperous sister should see so very much to rave about in Kitty, and so little worth mention in her artless Flo. Mack himself, having no daughter of his own, should have accorded to Flora, argued Mrs. Cullin, all the affection, and concomitants, he would have lavished on a child of his flesh and blood; whereas it was obvious that Mack thought far more of Kitty, who, said Mrs. Cullin, was nothing to him whatever, and narrowly escaped saying "at all at all." The sisters were never uncontrollably Celtic until they waxed overexcited; then blood would tell. Mrs. Mack excused her liege lord's apparent lack of appreciation of her sister's offspring by saying Mack had known Kitty almost from her baby days, but Mrs. Cullin could not be readily placated. She found very much, therefore, that was reprehensible in Kitty Belden's bringing up. She had had very much to say about so young a girl's being permitted to ride alone with certain officers—

young girl's heads were so apt to be turned by the silly things young men were sure to say.

"Do they say 'em to Flo?" demanded Mrs. Mack, well knowing they did not and why.

"They don't, because Flo has been properly brought up, and has too much dignity," said Mrs. Cullin, in appropriate reply. Mrs. Cullin had made much, very much, of the strange fact that Mrs. Bullard so desired to see and question Kitty the day after the mysterious assault on Mr. Langham. Indeed it must be owned that many other women were somewhat similarly impressed, possibly because Mrs. Cullin, in telling of it, laid such stress upon the incident. "What could Kitty Belden possibly or properly know concerning Mr. Langham that Mrs. Bullard could so earnestly desire to hear?" was the oft repeated demand. Kitty Belden, it will be remembered, had not attended the dance. It was her mother's dictum that Kitty should not go to "grown-up dances" until she was a young lady, and that, so Mrs. Belden would have people believe, was a much longer way off than Kitty's face and form would indicate. Kitty had been riding the very day of "Hardtack's" arrival and that of the hapless quarrel at the mess—riding well out south-eastwards, across the Minneconjou, for Mrs. Bullard, driving out with friends from town to witness the review,

had seen her scampering along the springy "bench" beyond the stream. Kitty had for many weeks delighted in watching Mrs. Bullard dance and waltz and "tennis" and even ride, though in that accomplishment Kitty had no rival in the valley. But Kitty's interest had changed to avoidance, though she would say no word, and so it happened that when (a few days after Langham's misadventure and Kitty's reappearance on the piazza and on pony-back) it was quite possible for Mrs. Bullard to see and question her, the question was never asked. In some other way, perhaps, the lady had discovered what she sought to know, and now, when at last Kitty would shyly and confidingly, perhaps, have spoken with her, Mrs. Bullard was miles away.

A sore little heart was this that beat in Kitty's breast, the soft July evening of the colonel's dinner. There was to be a garrison dance at the hall that evening, no "grown-ups" bidden from beyond the sentry lines, just the lads and lassies of Minneconjou and their own elders, all because Kitty was seventeen and Kitty's mother would have done nothing to mark the day. There were those, indeed, who thought the colonel showed a spirit of malicious mischief in the matter; that in pleasing Kitty and delighting her father he was tormenting Mrs. Belden. Perhaps he was. Mrs. Belden was set against it from

the start, saying Kitty had "had far too much nerve strain and excitement during the past two months," but Belden, believing and fondly hoping it might do Kitty good and, as he whispered to his inner consciousness, "take her out of herself," had as strenuously argued in favor of the plan. Kitty, could she have declined without remark, would gladly have escaped it all, but there was now a sorrow that must be hidden from everyone, even Daddy, and with all loyal show of gratitude and every effort to be gay, she had accepted and was doing her best.

Dinner was over by nine o'clock and the dance begun before call to quarters was sounding on the night. The bandsmen were playing their prettiest because it was for Kitty, the captain's winsome child; Kitty, the daughter of the regiment, and for Kitty the 2—th to a man would do everything that was daring and devoted. There were sergeants in the line who had trundled her in her baby carriage, and had even borne her in their sturdy arms. They and some of the regimental wives and mothers and children were peering in at the windows, even as the sentry started the shout half-past ten. There had been a dinner at the mess, too, that evening, given to certain brother officers from Meade and Niobrara, and while they and most of the elders of the mess were still lingering

over the cigars and chat, the Scotch and soda, the young bachelors were all at Kitty's dance, and with them, somewhat unlooked for, though of course invited—Mr. Crabbe.

Crabbe had been regarded as one of the best dancers—perhaps *the* best—in the regiment until Langham came, and to-night Crabbe was there to reassume his title. He had not been sparing with the champagne at dinner. He had reinforced its stimulus with occasional nips of the colonel's capital punch, and, as the list of dances was now well-nigh finished, he stood flushed with the sense of exhilaration and triumph, after a delightful turn with a most proficient waltzer—Mrs. Briggs—when Kitty Belden, all in shimmering, gossamer white went floating, circling by, barely supported by Shannon's entwining arm. It had been an evening of manifold delights to her. Everyone had been cordial and kind. Even Mrs. Cullin had smiled. The colonel and his wife had overwhelmed her with compliment and congratulation; so for that matter had the young gallants, and with reason, as they could not but remark, for in a single month the tall slip of a girl had blossomed into the sweet and tender loveliness of youthful womanhood. All on a sudden it had dawned on every man present that Kitty Belden was a beauty. "That child dances like a dream," said

Mrs. Mack, whose own dances were all dreams in the sense that they could no longer be realities.

"She dances as she rides," said Mack, who knew no higher comparison, and Crabbe, hearing both comments and seeing as he heard, and marveling much that he had never seen it all before, and being, moreover, in overconfident and exultant mood, marched straightway over to where she now stood with Shannon, who, plying her fan, was looking down adoringly into her sweet, yet serious face. Crabbe was upon them before either was conscious of his coming, and with both hands extended, the right as though about to circle her waist, the left in search of hers, and with never a "by your leave" to her partner, he spoke masterfully:

"I *must* have one turn, Miss Kitty. It's the last waltz, they tell me."

Shannon whirled on him, with a scowl. Kitty, wincing as though stung, glanced up with something like terror in her eyes and shrank from the contact of his touch. It was all done in an instant, yet in that instant Belden, the father, had seen it all, and in the next was at his daughter's side. He *knew*, and was the only man who could aid or interpose.

"One minute, Crabbe," he said, with quick but cool decision, and the gold knot on his left shoulder heaved

forcefully between the subaltern and the shrinking girl. "A fond paternal had been waiting just two hours for this very turn. It's promised, you see." And Kitty was sailing away on her father's arm before the sentence was fairly finished. Belden still danced gracefully and well, and Kitty had ever loved to dance with him, yet never so gladly, so gratefully as at this moment. "Oh, Daddy, how splendid of you!" she whispered. "But I—I must dance with him—I know I must!" Belden, too, knew. What explanation could follow her refusal? Crabbe was an officer of their own regiment, neither honored nor liked, it was true, but what could justify a point-blank refusal. "But—can you?" murmured Belden, his eyes anxiously searching her paling, downcast face. Up it came at the question, pluck and determination in her gaze. She even smiled over her white shoulder toward the discomfited officer as they circled near. "Watch me," she whispered fondly, as she pressed her father's arm. Another moment and the tireless, tiny, slender feet were twinkling to the spot where Crabbe and Shannon stood at gaze, neither as yet speaking to the other, and then, winsome, smiling, even almost radiant, she swung from the captain's arm straight to the senior subaltern's. "I'm honored indeed," said this arch dissembler, as in long, graceful, gliding step the

two went circling away in perfect time with the dreamy waltz music, leaving Shannon in envious admiration, Belden in amaze, and both in silence, staring after them. That night it dawned on Belden that his precious daughter was a woman—a woman with both wit and will.

Never before on those informal occasions when the few young girls of the garrison were present, had Mr. Crabbe deigned to ask Kitty Belden to dance; never, in fact, had he cared to notice her. This night he looked upon her almost in fascination. This night, never dreaming how she rebelled at heart against the pressure of his arm, the near presence of that glistening insignia on his breast, he found himself marveling at the fairy lightness of her step, the lissome grace of her slender form. He saw that many an eye was watching them. He knew that nowhere did he appear to such advantage as in the dance. Spare and somewhat angular as was his build, he had strength and elasticity, thorough control and admirable idea of time and rhythm. Elated exultant, overstimulated, Crabbe outdanced himself and overleaped the bounds of caution or convention. The hot blood mounting to his brain, the soft tendrils of her sunny hair sweeping his cheek and his face—downward bent and covetous of the slight, involuntary caress—the faint contact of the graceful, gliding form, all served

to blind his eyes to new conditions—to some new stir and movement about the doorway, and to steep his senses in a dream of conquest. “Kitty Belden,” he murmured, with a world of meaning in his tone, “do you realize that you are simply—exquisite to-night?”

The next instant he stood alone, and the room was reeling. With sudden force she had thrust him from her; had slipped from his clasp; had sprung to her father's side, gasping. Belden was hurrying toward the gathering group at the doorway, and, glad of anything to hide her rage, her vehement agitation, Kitty seized his hand and went speeding beside him. White, scared faces were those that greeted them. Awe and consternation spoke in the very silence that had replaced the babble of the moment before. Someone, with sudden signal, had checked the music, and only scurrying feet for the moment could be heard. Then came the cause, the repetition of the few dread words:

“Amos Bullard—shot and dying!”

“In God's name—who?—how?” stammered the colonel, and Baker, bearer of the news, replied:

“I don't know, but—they've arrested—*her*.”

CHAPTER XV

WHO WAS THE WOMAN?

AUGUST. Amos Bullard still lived, and Eleanor Bullard, his wife, who for a time had stood accused of shooting him, had by his own admission, given in faint, gasping whisper, been released from surveillance, if not placed beyond suspicion. Indeed, there had been days when it seemed as though her life, too, hung in the balance, and Silver Hill's foremost physician had been reinforced by the professional aid of both doctors from Fort Minneconjou. There was even talk of sending for still another from far Chicago.

And all the busy towns and self-styled "cities" of the Hills had buzzed with excitement over the thrilling affair. All the mining camps and cattle ranges knew that Amos Bullard had borne his wife a prisoner to the uttermost of his possessions; had held her there, secluded and without feminine companionship or sympathy until, alarmed by the symptoms, he had with secrecy and by short stages brought her again to Silver Hill. It was speedily known that the big wagon with its spanking four-horse team had swept into town at four o'clock in the morning—

the very morning of Kitty Belden's birthday; that Dr. Draper, summoned by galloping courier, was on hand with a trained nurse to attend her; that she had been aided to her room and there ministered to by Draper, the nurse, and the housemaid; that Draper had come away "looking wrathful" at seven; that the nurse left Bullard's roof early in the afternoon, saying in explanation of her return to her lodging that Mr. Bullard had insulted her. Draper, who had a case to attend to at a distant ranch, returned at 6 P. M. and was surprised and disturbed to find the nurse awaiting him. It was true he had informed Bullard that Mrs. Bullard had no serious bodily ailment, that she was overwrought, unstrung, nervously ill, that she required rest, that she should be sent East to the seashore if he desired her speedy resoration to health, whereupon Bullard had burst into a torrent of invective, accused Draper of being in league with his wife to get her away from her husband's roof, and to enable her to join her bankrupt and disgraced lover at some Atlantic summer resort. Draper left in wrath too deep for words. The nurse, a middle-aged and most respectable woman, quit in similar frame of mind, after vainly protesting against Bullard's coarse accusation and dangerous interference.

The unhappy patient was left to the care of the maid-

servant and the tirades of her legal master, and Draper had just about decided that it was his professional duty to go again and demand admission to the sick chamber, and the nurse had gone to apprise Mrs. Lawrence of what had taken place and to ask her advice, when about 9.30 in the evening a wild rumor rushed like the wind through the town—Amos Bullard had been shot by his wife.

This much was known to a certainty: The maid-servant had come running, weeping, from the house shortly after nine, telling certain curious loiterers, attracted by the sound of furious language on the second floor, that Mr. Bullard had gone just stark, staring mad, and she couldn't stay another minute. "He was so wild-like, somebody really ought to call the police," but she dare not; he might kill her. Bullard was still raging at somebody—"his poor wife that was nearly dead now," sobbed the maid. Then more people came, and one or two ventured into the wide-open doorway, but the maid ran round to the gardener's cottage—her brother's, it seems—and there was more furious raving aloft. "Will you give me your word?" was shouted thrice. No response was audible. Then came the sound of a curse, a blow—a heavy blow—a fall, then other tones, a woman's, in vehement denunciation, then two shots in quick

succession, a wild cry, and among the four or five men and boys of the townsfolk, huddled at the broad front steps, there was not one who dared enter until the gardener and a constable came running. These two darted in and bounded up the stairs. They found Bullard writhing in agony and terror on a sofa in the hall, bleeding and moaning. They found her, his wife, in a deathlike swoon on the floor in her bedroom. There was an angry red, puffing bruise spreading over the left side of her face, a bruise that soon began to turn black and purple. There lay close by her hand a revolver with three chambers still loaded, with its bore and muzzle smudged and blackened. Then Draper came springing up the stairs, and the house was filling with pallid, excited, chattering neighbors, street folk and strangers. Someone was sent on the run for Draper's instruments, bandages, etc.,—someone for Mrs. Lawrence and the nurse—someone for the cashier and other bank people. Some ran this way and some that. There was confusion and coming and going for as much as twenty minutes before a level-headed town marshal finally cleared the premises of strangers. Then other doctors, hearing the news, had come, scenting possible professional employment, and Bullard had been lifted, senseless now, to his bed, undressed, and examined. "Dangerous, if not fatal," was

the instant verdict, for both shots had told. Both had been fired so close that the clothing was scorched. Mrs. Bullard, too, had been borne to her couch, and women, tearful but skilled, were caring for her. At ten o'clock there was not a vestige of doubt in the minds of Silver Hill that, stung, goaded, struck down, possibly in fear of her life, Mrs. Bullard had fired the fatal shot. In fact, who else was there? When the maid came rushing from the room she had left husband and wife alone. Moreover, there was the pistol, Eleanor's own, one that Bullard had given her the previous year. The maid knew it well, knew that even that very day it had been lying there on the dressing table, close to the spot where it and its owner had fallen.

And yet when Eleanor Bullard was able to speak and think, she solemnly declared to Mrs. Lawrence, to Dr. Draper, to Dr. Warren, and his sympathetic wife, that she had not even touched the pistol; that she had fallen, stunned; that she never knew a shot had been fired until the following day. But what was this against such array of circumstantial evidence? When Jim Gridley, hurrying back from the seaboard on receipt of the news, sprang from the "Flyer" four days later and asked for the latest tidings, they told him that Mrs. Bullard stood charged with the crime and was a prisoner in her own room, await-

ing the verdict of the physician in her own case—and in his. Whereupon Gridley amazed and much offended his informants by saying the men or women who accused her were a pack of fools.

Between life and death Bullard lay for two weeks. Thrice they thought him going; once they thought him gone, and yet he rallied, and one evening, the last of July, he waked from long stupor and asked for his wife. He was woefully weak and emaciated. The feeble spark of life that remained might be fanned to a flickering blaze or blown out of existence by a breath; but the great eyes rolled wistfully about in search of what he craved, and Draper tip-toed to the opposite room and told Mrs. Bullard of his appeal, and Mrs. Bullard rose and followed, leaving Mrs. Lawrence to receive and respond to the card just brought upstairs—that of a frequent visitor, Lieutenant Gridley.

An unpopular man had the tall officer become among the populace of Silver Hill. They had never too well liked the beautiful but somewhat exclusive woman whom Bullard had so proudly established at the head of his board and household. By both education and antecedents she belonged to a class of which there were not three representatives among the women, or five among the men, of the sturdy young metropolis. Society at the

fort was the nearest approach to what she had known in her past, but even there only a limited few of the women had had her advantages. Mrs. Lawrence was her only intimate in town. The other women, envious, jealous, or regarding her as one of the detested "aristocratic class," felt for her no scintilla of kindliness. She had been courteous, even cordial at first, in her manner to all. She had striven to make her husband's people like her.

But the first to dislike, really, were the wives of the other officers of the bank. There had been one sweet, young wife and mother, the first year of her coming, to whom Mrs. Bullard became much attached, the helpmate of the division superintendent of the railway, but he had been promoted and had taken her to other fields. For that year the two women had been well-nigh inseparable, and it was long before Mrs. Lawrence could begin to fill the vacant place. Mrs. Bullard's preference for fort society, therefore, had robbed her of the regard of society in town. It fairly rejoiced over her apparent flirtation with Langham. It prophesied—no matter what—of her. It I-told-you-so'd the stories of the frequent quarrels between husband and wife. It actually reveled at her abduction at the hands of her own husband. It was agape, but in no wise surprised, at the news that

she had finally shot him. Therefore were they, men and women both, incensed with Jim Gridley because of his having said they were fools—that they believed in her guilt. They derided him that he should declare it his purpose to prove his words. They sneered at his closetings with the sheriff and certain others in authority. They scoffed at her statement, spread abroad by Mrs. Lawrence, that she had been felled, knocked senseless, and that she never heard or knew a thing for hours thereafter. “What a pitiable lie!” said Silver Hill. Were there not half a dozen citizens willing to swear they heard a woman’s voice threatening, fearless, furious, after the blow, after the fall, and before the shots, and did not everybody know that, except cook in the basement and cook’s young girl niece washing dishes below stairs, there was not another woman in the house? There was only one woman left in that room, or on that floor, when the maid came away in her distress. There had been, they said, no woman among the earlier listeners at the front—none heard of elsewhere about the premises—no one but that trembling maid-servant who had run away to the gardener’s. One or two men had ventured up the steps in the dark and into the dimly lighted hall, but not a sign of a woman. Yet a woman’s voice “giving Bullard hell,” said the hearers, had been plainly

heard just after the blow. Who could it have been but Mrs. Bullard? Mr. Gridley was himself a fool.

Possibly he was, but a busy one, at least. In every direction he had been wiring after Prim, the former lady's maid. At every opportunity he had been begging Mrs. Lawrence to see if some trace did not remain of the mysterious letters that had been slipped in under the door, but all to no useful purpose. Prim, indeed, had been found, but Prim vowed she knew no more now than she did before, of the writer of those threatening missives. Then, as Gridley could not see Mrs. Bullard, or, rather, as she would not see him, at least not yet, he besought Mrs. Lawrence to strive to obtain from her some description of the wording of the letters, the signature, the writing, but no description of any value came. Then he had interviewed conductors and station agents as to women passengers arriving during the past three weeks, coming from a distance to Silver Hill, and nothing did this profit him, and now, when he craved the privilege of fighting like a knight of old for her, a defenseless woman, proving her best friend and her entire innocence, she excused herself from coming down to see him. She had gone instead to see the man who had vilified, cursed, and beaten her. No wonder Gridley was sore!

And Mrs. Lawrence could not comfort him. She was

speaking urgently when an attendant suddenly appeared. "Will Mrs. Lawrence step up to Mr. Bullard's room? Mr. Bullard wants to see her right away." "I'll wait," said Gridley briefly, and she hastened aloft.

In five minutes she was down again, her eyes snapping, her cheeks aflame with excitement. "Dr. Draper wishes you to come at once," said she, and together they ascended the soft carpeted stairway, and for the first time in a month Jim Gridley looked upon the face of Eleanor Bullard, and a great pity surged from his very soul at sight of her, and then he looked upon the wreck that lay so feebly moaning there upon the bed—the broken, cringing, helpless old man, and Gridley could have kicked himself for the hours of impotent hate and wrath he had lavished upon what had been a forceful, dominant, even brutal leader of men and beater of women, now nothing better than an abject, whimpering child. No time was lost. "You, too, should hear this, lieutenant," said Dr. Draper. Then, bending down over his stricken patient, Draper motioned Gridley to do likewise and asked:

"How was she dressed—the woman of whom you speak?"

"Man's clothing—felt hat, dark," was the whispered answer. "O God, doctor! have I got—to die?"

"Don't worry about that. We're pulling you through. Tell us what she said—before shooting. Then I'll get you to sleep again."

"Cursed me; called me brute and coward. I tried to stop her and she grabbed the pistol and fired. Oh, can't somebody—pray?" Then came the piteous moaning again, like that of a fevered child.

"You're sure it wasn't accidental?"

"Sure! She'd been threatening me nearly a year."

Dr. Draper arose, turned, took both Mrs. Bullard's hands in his and solemnly said: "I ask your pardon that, for a time, knowing the provocation, I believed. Here stands a man who from the very first scouted the idea and insisted you were innocent."

And unthinkingly, perhaps, he placed her right hand in that of Gridley, and, lifting up her eyes, she looked through shining tears into the soldier's rugged, twitching face.

Then Draper swept them from the room, for again his patient went whimpering away into dreams of dread and death.

Those dreams served some purpose. There were just and righteous residents of Silver Hill quite ready to swear that Draper kept his luckless victim in the conviction that any hour might be his last, and wrung from

him the so-called ante-mortem statement, that, duly witnessed and signed, was speedily in the hands of the constituted authorities. It was the expressed conviction of many a Silver Hiller that Warren, of the army medical department, and Mack and Gridley aided and abetted in the nefarious scheme. It was predicted that when Bullard got well, as eventually he might, he would "go back on the statement," but the prediction fell flat.

A strange story Bullard told, one that stamped him at once as a man capable of almost any desperate deed and of almost every despicable cowardice. Divested of legal phraseology, and expurgated of oaths, groans, and complainings, it was substantially as follows: He had made the bulk of his fortune in Nevada. Business took him frequently to San Francisco, where he had formed a connection with a young and attractive widow. Not until completely in her toils did he learn that she had a husband living, and she professed to be in terror of him and of his return. Bullard had been advised to try Carlsbad, and he took her abroad with him. She had beauty and grace. She fascinated him until her demands became intolerable. The more he gave, the more she wanted. They quarreled and he left her. She followed to Paris, and finally she promised, if given twenty-five thousand dollars, to worry him no more. Already she had ensnared

a younger lover, and Bullard thought himself well rid of her. In New York, the next year, he saw and loved—these words were his own—“the noble woman whom I finally induced to become my wife.” Meantime his investments in the Black Hills began to demand personal attention. They were not turning out as he hoped. He drew out of everything on the Pacific slope; settled in Silver Hill. (There wasn’t silver enough in the Sagamore to pay the cost of smelting, though they did find gold in limited quantities.) Then he went back to his wooing. She and her kindred were poor. He bought her with his promises and protestations. And she came to this strange land and did her best, though he knew she was pining for home and friends—until that infernal creature, whom he had thought silenced forever, ran him down and began writing. She had been deserted, so she said; was in New York “flat broke,” must have money and lots of it or she’d break his marriage. Bullard refused aid or answer. She moved to Chicago and opened her second parallel in the siege approaches, and still he braved her. Then the letters began to come from Omaha. Then, despite his vigilance, they were slipped beneath the door and even to her, his wife, his idol. Then came his wife’s demand for explanation, and his lie. Then came proofs of his lie, and his wife’s contempt.

Then came fierce rage and jealousy and young Langham, and when Bullard sought to interpose, she defied him, asked him who was he to preach morality to her. He now declared, upon what was probably his dying bed, that he believed his wife had never met Langham alone except on the open prairie when they rode together, but for a time he had thought otherwise, and she disdained to answer his accusations.

By this time the breach between them had become impassable. She declared her purpose of returning to her people. He had eagerly harvested all the claims against Langham, thinking in that way to ruin him, but overreached himself in taunting his wife with having given her love to a bankrupt and swindler. She knew Langham's mother and Langham's people, knew his mother's business manager, believed him to be dishonest, put Langham on his guard, to the end that Langham was on the point of demanding a full accounting. This would have re-established Langham and ruined the agent. Indeed it was really Mrs. Bullard's urging that led to "that Sunday school villain's" exposure.

Then Bullard—he owned it all now—in his jealous rage, sought to temporarily, but forcibly and effectually, put Langham out of the race. Le Gros and other half-breeds had long been in his occasional employ. He

employed them again—Le Gros, Wolf, and Belles Pierres. The plan was that they were to meet him, sham drunk, force a fight, then pound him into a pulp. Bullard was horrified, however, to hear the night of the ball that Langham had been shot and killed at the fords. Earlier in the evening he had heard of the quarrel at the mess and of Crabbe's threats. He had just found Crabbe's insignia on the floor of the dressing room. He was in terror lest suspicion be cast upon himself, for he knew the trend of town and garrison talk. He saw a chance to divert suspicion to Crabbe, and—dropped the insignia at the scene of the assault, just where Baker found it.

Then he learned that Mrs. Bullard had actually communicated with this woman who was hounding him, and was perfecting arrangements to meet her in Omaha. He had set the groom Jennings, "specially recommended" for such duties, spying on her every act abroad, and had easily succeeded in making a spy of the English lady's maid, Prim. He did not trust even Jennings. It was this man that drove him in the dogcart out to a disreputable ranch southwest of town the day of the dance, and had seen, though he could not hear, the conference with Le Gros. That morning's mail had told of the coming of Shafto, a first cousin of Langham's mother, and his young secretary. He knew Shafto in business, knew

that Langham would probably meet him at the train and still be back in time to dance again and again with his beautiful wife. Now was the chance for Le Gros to act, and the miserable dog had gone away out to the ranch, and was probably half drunk. Still, Le Gros seemed to understand what was wanted, and driving home, the banker believed his brutal plans would succeed and no man be the wiser. Yet he shrank and trembled at sight of Kitty Belden, riding away up the valley. Could that child, too, have been spying on him?

Not daring to remain about Silver Hill, he went to Chicago and Omaha, ostensibly on business, but really to try to bring that woman to reason and to terms. Her demands far outdid all previous flights. Through his sacrifices to Shafte and others he had lost much, and it would have ruined him, he said, to meet her claims. Now, moreover, she avoided him. He spent days and nights in futile effort. She would not be bagged. Then his spies warned him he would better hurry home. He did so and found his wife gone to the fort, riding. Then it was he made his next essay.

He had paid Le Gros before going east, and the black-guard was ugly and truculent. He had paid him to do more—to frighten Mrs. Bullard and make her dread riding alone. He now gave him, in his desperation, still

more to do. He knew that any day his wife might leave him. Langham was mending and called to the East. Lieutenant Gridley had surprised him, before his visit to Chicago, with full cash payment of every claim he held against Langham. Bullard believed that his wife's purpose was to find that horrible woman and then to follow Langham. A wild idea possessed him of having her run off by the renegade Sioux—she and Jennings both! then he would follow and rescue her from the traditional horror worse than death. But something scared them off. Ever since Wounded Knee they had been timorous, and Shannon's party sent one lot going, and the mere sight of Kitty Belden was enough to stampede those with Le Gros. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to abduct his wife himself, and with the aid of his blackguard henchmen this was done. She fought so hard and then drooped so dreadfully that in his alarm he brought her back. Then she had demanded, and Draper had advised, that she be sent East at once. She had received in some mysterious way further news. Bullard thought it was from Langham, and went wild with rage. That night he strove to bind her by promises, and she would not even answer. Weak and broken as she was, she defied him, and in his fury he struck and felled her. A moment later a man rushed in from the

hallway and in a woman's voice damned him for all that was damnable. He sprang for the pistol on the dresser, but she, the woman he had dreaded, was too quick for him. She grabbed it and fired. They knew the rest. So vanished all his hopes and schemes. So vanished the woman who had beaten him at last, for not a trace of her was found. So ended the long, wretched lesson. So ended "what happened in the West."

PART TWO

What Happened in the East

PRELIMINARY LETTERS

THE UNIVERSITY CLUB, December 27, 1897.

DEAR GRIDLEY:

Yours of the 16th came during a brief absence in Boston. Shafto and I spent Christmas with some of mother's relatives—rather a sad visit, yet fruitful in result. You know they never quite approved of me for having gone to Yale instead of Harvard, and thereafter to the army—and destruction. Shafto is no such bad lot as you, and indeed I, thought. He knew nothing of me except what mother and mother's agent told him, and the first was as misleading one way as the second was the other. She painted me a saint; he a sinner. Shafto finally told me the fellow made him believe I had bled her for years; that she was almost swamped by my gambling debts; that I had forged her name, etc., etc., all, of course, under promise that Shafto would not reveal his knowledge to her or to me. That was the secret of his treating me so cavalierly on his way west. Pyne has told me still more, for it is so sore a point with Shafto he hates to speak of it. Pyne continues steady as a rock,

and thoroughly reliable. Shafto says mother made Pyne his secretary and missed it by not making him her own.

So poor, loving "Mummie's" prayers are answered at last. "Cousin Percy" and her only Pitt are friends.

You couldn't help liking him, Grid, though I'm not so sure he at first would like you. (His Christmas dinner was spoiled because a semi-bucolical kinsman wore a white tie with his Tux.) He's a horseman, too, though you wouldn't think it to see him in saddle. (I fancy what he'd say to see us in our Whitmans, for the cow-boys' seats and saddles at Billings set his teeth and temper both on edge for a week), but he has a head for business and is a "comer" in the Street, despite which fact I suspect him of a longing to sell out all his American securities and hark back to Pall Mall. Indeed, I know he would but for one thing—a determination to land that psalm-singing, sermonizing swindler in Sing Sing. The last heard of the cad was in Honduras, with his wife and children here facing the pity of the pious.

Now, to answer your questions:

1. Yes, I have heard from Mrs. Bullard. She took him to Nassau for the winter, as I told you. He's better, seems to suffer much less in that soft climate, and then—he is safe from his persecutor. Mrs. Bullard has promised to save any letter that may come, as you

urged, but the blackmailing lady seems to have quit the business.

One thing Shafto learned from the bank that Bullard did not mention and we did not know. Bullard had actually sent, to the place named by that feminine sharper, fifteen thousand dollars as a bribe not to come near him or his wife. It was sent just before the shooting, and it is believed she got some share of it. That will keep her quiet a while, but she will begin again, I fancy, when the money is gone and she finds he has recovered of his wounds. She is smart enough to know he dare not prosecute her.

You come in for honorable mention in Mrs. Bullard's latest bulletin, which was dated November 5th (reminiscent of Guy Fawkes), but it is mainly of him and his prospects she writes. I fancy there is no chance of his ever getting on his legs again, and to think of that blessed woman devoting her life to what is left of his!

2. Yes, the sale was neither forced, nor was it in any sense a sacrifice. I was more than able to send the cheque, though I could not begin to say with what gratitude. Dear old chap, the pecuniary side of my obligation to you, big as it was, is the only part of it I have been or ever shall be able to meet. Of course it was something of a wrench to part with the house that so long

had been mother's, but it was about the only thing—that and her jewels, which are now safe in the vault—our ingenious financial adviser had not succeeded in converting into cash. The property had greatly appreciated in value, netting some seventy-two thousand dollars. Of course much of this has to go into a trust fund for the payment of father's old pensioners, leaving me with my head above water and perhaps two thousand a year. Shafto pays me twenty-five hundred more, and a small interest, to hold down a desk in his office. I don't seem to have to do much else, though he says I'm learning the business. Forty-five hundred a year isn't bad for a bachelor even here, but of course one can't marry on it, as Miss Amy Vane was prompt to assure me. "Oh, my cousin—shallow-hearted," but wasn't that a winner? And what would poor "Mummie" have said? From my cradle days she had me engaged to that very superior young woman, who has justified the confidence reposed in her and won my undying esteem by seeing how absurd was the proposition. We are far better friends, Amy and I, than ever we could have been—coupled. She says when she marries it must be a man with a million, like Cousin Shafto ('pon my soul I think she'd cap him if she could), or a man among a million, Jim, like—who do you think?—like *you*. That girl's eyes brimmed over when

I told her what you had been to me, and may I be kicked for calling her shallow-hearted! It's all off, however, and I'm cad enough to be breathing freer. Yet mother had so set her heart on it, and had been saving and scraping, and I dare say might have been speculating for me.

Shafto and I have a flat in Fifty-fifth Street, where we sleep, take our matitutinal eggs, tea, and toast; thence we "elevate" to Rector Street; thither we return toward five to dress for dinner, and see no more of each other until tub-time next morning. Sundays, after the fashion of our forefathers, and because mother loved it, I sit with him under the superb window in her old pew, and we follow the service of the church, even though we cannot always follow the sermon—Shafto has the blessed gift of sitting erect and sleeping. That Sunday service, with the appropriate top-hat and frock, is about my only link with the world in which she hoped to see me shine. Being in deep mourning accounts for my non-appearance at functions of other kinds, and saves me the explanation that other extravagances are beyond my means.

Shafto's evenings go to whist at the Union Club; mine, as a rule, to drills at the armory. How do I like it? First rate. Of course we can't have the set-up and style we insist on with our fellows in the regular service, but there's a heap of comfort to be got from the way the

officers study and work, and, so far as indoor drills and ceremonies are concerned, even Briggs and Belden would applaud. My becoming major of the second battalion was an odd piece of luck. You didn't seem over-pleased with my having accepted the inspectorship of small arms practice on the division staff (Shafto growled, too, and said it was such a waste of time), but, I say to you again, Gridley, this nation of ours cannot run along much longer without getting into a scrap somewhere, and then the volunteers will have the best show, as they always have had. I've learned this from older heads than yours or mine. Well, to get back to business. One night in October Major Curtis was ill, the senior captain absent, I was there as a spectator, and they asked if I wouldn't drill the battalion. I did. Then they asked me to come again, and I did. Last month Curtis resigned and went abroad, and the regiment asked me to quit the staff and come to the line. The general approved, and there you are. Two nights a week we had battalion drill in preparation for the review, etc., before your old commander, General Merritt. Two weeks ago it came off in grand style, and the regiment never did better. There wasn't room for regimental evolutions, so when he expressed a wish to see a battalion drill, it was the second and your humble servant that were told to take the floor, and

I wish you and Briggs might have seen it. Our major general afterwards presented me to your major general, and, by Jove, who should there be standing to his left and rear but "Old Hardtack"!—here on leave, a looker-on, in cits! but he "rung in" on them somehow, and you should have seen his grim old face when I saluted, and stood at salute until he shoved out his hand. He has to retire next month, and is dying hard.

Yes, I do miss Gordon and Champion and the breezy gallops and the pine-scented air, the band, and the kindly faces and the pleasant chat over the afternoon teacups, and my heart goes out in gratitude to Mrs. Warren, heaven bless her! and to Mrs. Mack, as well as several others. I've only myself and my pride, I suppose, to thank for the fact that there were not more friends. I love to picture Kitty Belden taking Gordon over the ditches, and can readily imagine her as you describe. Some little holiday "momentums" went to her, to several others, and to you, that I hope to hear of as safely received. My hearty greeting always to the colonel, to Baker, Belden, Briggs, Field, Shannon, Warren, and—well, you know the men. As for you, Gridley, it is useless trying to say anything. "Some day I shall meet you."

Yours as ever,

LANGHAM.

P. S.—Dispatch in evening papers from Pine Ridge says Tall Elk and Bites-the-Bear, Ogallalla Sioux, were killed in row between Indian police and half-breeds, one of the latter, "Fat Johnny," mortally wounded. Is that our esteemed friend Le Gros? I'm ashamed of this letter. Fear no further infliction of anything like this length for at least another year.

FORT MINNECONJOU, January 5, '98.

DEAR LANGHAM:

It was good to get your letter. The only unwelcome part was what you say about writing at that length only once a year. The "momentums" came in safety, and the exclamations of delight and surprise at Warren's were worth hearing. The children screamed over theirs. I had been to town and came out in the sleigh with the Christmas boxes, and dropped in at the doctor's to see the opening. The colonel tells me Mrs. Mack was completely carried away by the bon-bon trays (Tiffany's, I suppose), and—it was like you not to forget the Cullins. They haven't too much sunshine in their lives, I reckon, and dependent women must lead a dog's life at best—a dog and cat life it would be, if Mrs. Mack were as censorious as her sister, which she isn't, but the best old soul in the business, and always telling Mrs. Sparker what

the regiment lost when you left it. Mrs. Belden, too, comes in for an occasional rap, but Mrs. Belden has moderated in many a way, it seems to me. You remembered her very prettily, I am glad to see, and Belden favored me with one of the priceless Partagas you sent him. (I prefer my corncob and Army plug, thank you.)

As for Miss Kitty—well, I presume she will be permitted to write her thanks, but really that is an elegant “crop,” and, in spite of the snow, she was out with it on Gordon the very next day, though what an army girl wants with a crop is too many for me. Crabbe, I should judge, regards it as utterly superfluous. That cross-grained, ill-conditioned cub is completely daft about our little girl—our tall “Lady Katherine,” rather, and the situation is getting serious. Belden never did like him, nor did Mrs. Belden; but he is conducting his campaign on scientific lines—making love through the mother—and while Kitty seems unimpressed, there is no doubt he is gaining ground with the still-in-the-ring maternal. Why, Langham, she is dancing more desperately than ever this winter, and Crabbe says she was married at sixteen. Who told him, do you s’pose?

Baker and Crabbe have clashed again, and the Old Man had to warn them both, for the major was fighting mad.

It all grew out of—but here, I hadn't opened my head about it, and yet am raining ink. Briggs's commission as captain came two weeks ago, and he has gone to Niobrara (F Company). Mrs. Briggs follows with the goods and chattels next week. Briggs's was a recess appointment, and Mack managed to stand off permanent selection of the adjutant until Briggs was confirmed by the Senate. This enabled him to detail Field as acting adjutant. Possibly he hoped Field might get his bar before January, so that he could make him actual adjutant, but Field is still two files away, and Crabbe felt confident. I *think* if he had spent more time at Mack's and less at Belden's the Old Man might have been talked into it, but Crabbe was too violently and blindly in love to keep away. (One reason Kitty rides so much in this bitter weather is because he can't begin to keep up with her.) Last month, though, Merton, whom you never met, threw up a college detail, arrived here unexpectedly last week, and was announced as adjutant forthwith. That settled Crabbe's aspirations, but not his temper.

Now, as to your letter. I own that I did take it a little amiss that you should consider it necessary to settle with me the moment the situation admitted of your settling with anybody. I never made a more satisfactory

investment. As to Gordon and Champion: the former was getting somewhat reconciled to my hand last autumn, and Miss Belden is gradually bringing even the latter to look upon me without disfavor as a possible rider. They are worth every cent they cost me, and I desire to part with neither. Crabbe asked me what I'd take for Gordon a while ago, and I said twenty-five hundred dollars. He said he believed I paid less than two hundred and fifty, but—I feel sorry for Crabbe.

All you tell me of Mr. Shafto is welcome reading. Stick to him and your fortune is made. How odd it is that Pyne should turn up again; so near the gallows in Cheyenne six years ago—Shafto's secretary, and your associate, to-day. I wonder sometimes if that sort of thing doesn't happen oftener than we know. There were people I knew in the 80's and haven't heard of since, and don't wish to again; yet, who can tell? The world is a pretty small place and I have seen, as yet, but a small part of it, but somehow I feel as though the field were widening every day. Through you I am getting to know something of New York, where I have never been. With you, I believe this nation can't go on much longer without having to take a hand in the affairs of other people. Things are pointing to Cuba, Cuba to Spain, and Spain to—what? The army has been a humdrum place since

the Indians succumbed, but another century is close upon us, and before it dawns—we will see what we shall see.

I wish I might see you at the head of your battalion. I feel that I may see you at the head of something bigger. Listen to no man who tells you a soldier is wasting time studying and practicing his profession. You and such as you are the ones who will be first in the field when the clash comes, and the clash is coming. Listen to the murmuring all over the country. Listen to the speeches in both houses of Congress! The President and the conservatives are doing their best for peace, but—what are they among so many?

The Old Man's eyes snapped when I told him of your meeting with "Old Hardtack." He "scored us proper" in his report, but didn't we deserve much of it—or most? I'm glad you saw our old cavalry chief. He should be the first general at the front, yet—who is to decide it?

Thanks you for tidings of Mrs. Bullard. The bank hears but seldom, and I believe no good offer has been made for the house. He cannot have too much ready money, though his estate ought to yield handsomely. Mr. Shafto bought in at a good time. If you hear how she—how they are doing, I wish you would let me know. And, write often, Langham, if only a few lines. There's

nothing here worth telling about that I haven't told, and much I have told isn't worth the reading.

Yours as ever,

GRIDLEY.

P. S.—Oh, about the row over at the reservation: It seems that a gang of French half-breeds had been hanging about there for months. They had to quit this neighborhood, even before Bullard's confession. Blossom has tried several times to kidnap them, but finally they became such nuisances that the agent ordered John Sword and his Indian police to run them off. It led to quite a scrimmage, unfortunately indecisive in result, as Belles Pierres and Wolf got away. Le Gros they couldn't miss. He was shot twice, and, though alive at last accounts, will be in no condition for further mischief.

Did Mrs. Bullard ever mention losing anything in the struggle at the cottonwoods?

UNIVERSITY CLUB, New York City, May 7.

DEAR GRIDLEY:

This should catch you at San Francisco. How wonderfully things have worked out! We are under arms and expect marching orders any moment. I may even have the silver leaves, for the colonel is a sure shot for brigadier general, both senators being behind him. The

senior major is at the head of a big mercantile concern here, and business will go to the dogs if he goes to war. He says, however, that he cannot resign until he has seen at least one battle. I'm in big luck anyhow. Shafto has given me two horses almost as good as Gordon, and too good for the Cuban climate. We expect to go to Jacksonville direct.

And you are destined for Manila. Six months ago the man that said Uncle Sam would ever send an army across the Pacific would have been jeered for a lunatic. Six weeks ago, not one man in twenty could locate the Philippines. Six days ago, the whole club was hunting for Manila on the map. Hurrah for Dewey and your namesake of the *Olympia*. (I didn't know you had any kindred in the navy. I don't believe you knew. Perhaps it isn't kin, but it's two of a kind.)

All good and glory go with you. Hearty greeting and best wishes to all.

Yours,

LANGHAM.

CAMP MERRITT, SAN FRANCISCO, May 27.

DEAR LANGHAM:

I send you this care of Percy Shafto, Esq., who will doubtless forward. Yours reached me here, where twenty thousand troops are gathering, and we go among

the first. The fourteenth beat your old regiment for the first flotilla. You are by this time at Jacksonville and your colonel has the predicted star, I see, so that turns your leaves to silver. Good luck to 'em.

Did you see the Bullards before leaving, and where can one address them? Our squadron may not get away until the second, or even third expedition, and there are some matters I should like to settle before going on foreign service. Wasn't it odd that our squadron and the old regiment should come here almost together? Belden commands the second battalion. Colonel Mack got his volunteer star, as you know, but has not yet received orders. Some of the families came with us so as to be on our side of the continent, they say, while we are on the t'other side of the ocean. Mrs. Belden and Kitty are in town at the Colonial, which is crowded with army folk. Mrs. Mack, Mrs. Briggs, and some of the brides, too, are there. Crabbe could have come out in command of "H" Company, but preferred to remain in "C" and Belden's battalion, so as to be in the same train and Pullman with Kitty, who cried her pretty eyes out, and I caught her at it, saying good-by to Gordon. I had to leave them. Our four troops go dismounted. No horses are to be taken by the officers, and what's more I heeded what you said and sent for Fox, who had been having a

hard, but I'm told reputable, time of it, and left him in charge of them.

The bank had nothing of an encouraging nature to tell of Bullard, and *do* you know anything as to their financial condition? Now that he is no longer fit to manage affairs, I somehow fear her interests may sadly suffer. Try to ascertain and let me know. And, you didn't answer my question as to Mrs. Bullard. Did she ever mention having lost anything in the struggle at the cotton-woods?

Shall be sending you a cable code before we sail. It will give me much comfort to be referring to you as *Colonel* Langham, and I know how little *Captain* Sparker and *Lieutenant* Crabbe will like it. Just suppose your regiment had been sent to join the Manila expedition (and why not, since Pennsylvania is—and New York may be—represented)? Suppose your regiment were here and brigaded with your old one! What possibilities might not result! Belden has just dropped in to ask me to dine with him and his in town. Sends best wishes. Most of them say most cordial regards. I don't quite understand Belden. You never had any difference with him, had you? He doesn't seem responsive, so to speak, and I thought you liked him. It may be Mrs. Belden has some lingering notion—some had, you know, about

the affair to which Bullard referred in his fool confession—and the best of men are sometimes influenced by anything but the best of women.

Yours as ever,

GRIDLEY.

JACKSONVILLE, June 15.

DEAR GRIDLEY:

Good luck and God speed. I know you are glad to be going. This may even be too late, but not until to-day did we get the news that you as well as the old regiment were slated for the next sailing. I wired Shafto to see the Bullards the moment they reached New York. He reports Bullard very feeble and quite childlike, and Mrs. Bullard with him constantly. They have means sufficient, but not abundant. Some properties are idle. Shafto will keep an eye on them. I cannot remember her having mentioned losing anything during her struggle with her abductors. What was it? The "codex" came and shall be utilized.

I've got my step all right, and don't much like it. A major amounts to something in the new dispensation, a lieutenant colonel to nothing. The new head of the regiment has long been a mere lay figure under our former colonel, and now he has all manner of theories to work out, and no more use for me than his colonel

had for him. We are all beginning to chafe with impatience. The regulars are being embarked. The State troops are doing nothing but drill, stew, and swear. How I wish we had been sent to the Pacific! I feel it in my bones you have stirring times ahead, and we have nothing but stagnation.

What you tell me of Belden is both a surprise and a sorrow. I liked and respected him more than any man in the regiment—more, even, than dear old Mack, who was so stanch a friend. I can't imagine what I have done to make him distrust or dislike me, though Mrs. Belden, as you suggest, seemed distinctly unfriendly at times. As for Kitty, who would ever do anything that would give her annoyance? God bless you, old chap! You well know how eagerly I'll watch for news of you.

Faithfully yours,

LANGHAM.

NEW YORK CITY, May 20, '99.

DEAR GRIDLEY:

I brought the regiment home in good shape, and we were duly mustered out last month. Well, we had no fighting such as fell to your lot and that of the old regiment, but if I haven't had a valuable experience keeping a sick and disgusted and disappointed lot of officers and men in trim, long after every chance of distinction was

gone, call me a duffer. Long ago as last October they began clamoring to be mustered out. In November Colonel Marsden threw up the sponge and quit, leaving to me his eagles and a sea of troubles. But—just glance over these copies of letters from various brigade, division, and corps commanders. (The originals are filed in the family Bible, where Shafto goes and blinks over them.) Other copies, with a ripping letter from Governor Roosevelt, went with my application for a lieutenant colonelcy in the National Volunteers. Then, old chap, “we’ll meet at (the) Philippi-nes.” Both senators are with the governor, so it looks like a sure shot. Shafto says I’m a fool to go, and offers me more than colonel’s pay to stay, but my heart’s in it.

Interrupted, and now it’s May 25, and it’s come, by Jove! They offer me senior major of the 3—th, and I accept. Had hoped, of course, for a grade higher, but it’s all right. Other field officers to be West Pointers. Glad you have your captaincy. Look for us in the fall or early winter. Belden is to be colonel of one of the regiments. Don’t know which.

Saw the Bullards last week. They live quietly, but in apparent ease, on Long Island. He is still dependent upon her for almost everything, and it is sad to watch him, and touching to watch her. The doctors do not

care to say how long he can last. Mrs. Bullard tells me nothing has been heard from the once importunate. What can have become of that woman?

Yours as ever,

LANGHAM.

U. S. TRANSPORT "AMANUENSIS,"

HONOLULU, October 20, '99.

DEAR GRIDLEY:

We dropped anchor just before sunset and must "lay by" here the hoith of a week for repairs. The skipper says our "brand new hull has damned old holes," so I'm sending you these lines by the *Doric*, sailing at dawn. It has been an interesting voyage thus far, if not an eventful one. The death of our gallant colonel, whom, thanks to his severe wounds, we never saw, gave me the silver leaves again last month, and the command of the heterogeneous array on this marine monster. (God grant she may not become a submarine before we leave her!) The colonel, with band, and second and third battalions, screwed ahead on the *Sheridan*, leaving me to bring the first battalion—my old one—and the third squadron of the —th cavalry, a number of Red Cross people, several officers of the line and staff going out to Manila, among them five returned from sick leave, and of these five,

Lieutenant Crabbe; finally, the wives and families of certain officers already in the islands, among these, Mrs. and Miss Belden, which accounts for the presence of Crabbe. He could and should have gone by the *Grant*, or, at least, by the *Sheridan*, but managed to hold over for the *Amanuensis*, in spite of its being known that I was to go in command.

And, Gridley, I foresee trouble. There was not the faintest friction at the start. The officers of the cavalry and these reporting as passengers, were courteous, soldierly, and subordinate. With only two or three exceptions they accepted the situation with every appearance of cordiality. In Crabbe's case there was an objectionable *access* of cordiality. He came on board as I was giving instructions to the officer-of-the-day, and accosting me as "Langham, old boy," expressed his delight at going over with "a former chum," and all but clapped me on the back. My own officers looked queer, and the men amazed. I shook hands with him civilly enough, but couldn't be, and wouldn't be, chummy; we never had been and he knew it. The moment I could take him into my stateroom I did so, and there, privately, told him he should have every right and courtesy due an officer of the regular army, but that nothing in our past warranted his assumption of familiarity, and it was something not

to be repeated. He said he only meant to assure me that bygones were bygones (which magnanimity I could not quite reciprocate), but he looked black as the devil I'm beginning to believe him to be. "Of course," said he, "if you're going to spring your rank on me I've nothing to say now, but——" "But what, Mr. Crabbe?" I asked, and he muttered something about accidents in high station; then left. I *ought* to have called him back—and to account—right then and there, but it might have looked like "rubbing it in," don't you see, so I let it go. Mistake No. 1.

Next. The arrangement of seats at table had to be settled first thing. There were two tables at which ten persons were to be seated. One of these was the commanding officer's, the other the ship captain's. The others accommodated twenty each at the sides and two at the ends. The quartermaster in charge asked me to name the officers and ladies to sit at my table, and he would assign the others. Looking over the list I found the wives of two colonels (Hill and Belden), each with grown daughters, Mrs. Hill with two, Mrs. Belden with one. That settled it. Mrs. Hill sat to my right, Mrs. Belden to my left; Dr. Forrest (1't. col. vols.) sat next Mrs. Hill; Lieut. Colonel Sheller (ordinance department), next Mrs. Belden; Daisy Hill next Dr. Forrest, "Topsy"

Hill (a joy of a girl she) next Colonel Sheller. My adjutant sat facing me, with Kitty Belden to his right and next Topsy. That left one seat, and Barton, the adjutant, came to me in an embarrassed way and said Lieut. Crabbe had been to him to say that he was an old regimental and personal friend of the Beldens, and that they especially desired that he should be seated with them. We had pulled out from Folsom Wharf by that time and were at anchor in the bay, waiting final instructions from headquarters. I had seen the Beldens but twice since reaching 'Frisco—Mrs. Belden quite as formidable and Miss Kitty not as friendly, somehow, as of old. She is a young lady now, very lovely, very correct, very everything, I dare say, she should be, but no longer our Kitty, our sweet, winsome, daring, darling Kitty, and she meant me, I thought, to see this, and see it I did—and more. And then I saw how he stood guard over her, and heard how inseparable they were, and, of course, when this matter came up in such a way, what could I say or do but assent? I had thought of giving that seat to Train, major and quartermaster of volunteers, a capital fellow, obviously smitten with Daisy Hill. I knew how he wanted it, but Barton prevailed against his own wish, I believe, and I was just on the point of saying, "Then give it to Mr. Crabbe," when, as I live,

there stood Kitty Belden herself, and for the first time looking as though she really wished to speak with me. The table card was in my hand; Barton had brought it, and she had followed him through a swarm of people along the port gangway bidding good-by to other swarms on the *McDowell*.

"What is it, Miss Belden?" I asked, stepping forward to meet her.

"Oh, *Colonel* Langham," said she, with lowered voice—and eyelids. "I know you are assigning seats, and *couldn't* you put Major Train next Daisy Hill? You don't know how they'd bless you, though she'd murder me if she thought I mentioned it!" And Miss Kitty's beautiful eyes were ablaze, and her face—by Jove, Gridley, you don't begin to know how pretty she's grown—was all flushing with excitement, and it just suited me to say: "It would be a pleasure, but that would—sacrifice Mr. Crabbe."

"I didn't know," said Miss Kitty, "Mr. Crabbe was even thought of." It was at the tip of my tongue—God forgive me for being so mean, even for a minute—to say, "He *says* it is at your request, or your mother's." How we do—not you, but humans like me—have to buck against our brute natures. What I did say was, "Well, Mr. Crabbe is your oldest friend on the passenger list,

and is of your own regiment." And the answer came like a shot:

"Put Major Train next Daisy *anyway*. Then if you *must* have Mr. Crabbe, Topsy and I can go to Major Blake's table. We'd rather sit there anyhow!" And with flashing eyes and flushing cheeks, away she went. Why, Gridley, those girls had talked it all over among themselves, I believe—she and Topsy, at least, and *there's* a brace of thoroughbreds that won't take gently to even a snaffle. It ended, of course, in Barton telling Crabbe there was only one seat that could be given, and that went to Major Train, his senior. This is doubly rough on Crabbe, because Train was graduated two years after Crabbe got his commission.

Now, I have had hardly ten words with Kitty Belden during the ten days it took this tub to get from sight of Alcatraz to soundings off Honolulu. She and Topsy Hill have turned things topsy-turvy. A madder, merrier pair of army girls you never saw in all your born days. Even the fog of the Farallones and the heave of the sea failed to dampen their spirits. They alone at my table haven't missed a meal. One day I couldn't face the family circle, though I never missed inspection. Crabbe was woefully sick the fourth day out, and has been in the dumps from the start. Everybody says she is tormenting

him to the verge of insanity, yet whenever I come across them she is listening with absorbed attention—and I seem forever coming across them. To-morrow the ladies go ashore to spend a few days at the Royal Hawaiian for change, and most of the officers go too, except my own. The staff and passengers, of course, require no permission. Crabbe has avoided me since the first day—never sees me, or salutes. I ought to cinch him and would, if he weren't Crabbe. Mistake No. 2.

We've got a lot of ammunition aboard, and the fifth night out we were wallowing a good deal, I thought, and many men were busy at the rail. Captain Cheyne, of the ship, grabbed me and whispered that there was fire below. We had had fire quarters every day, for sake of drill and discipline, with the alarm sounded at some odd hour, but never at night. We got down there in no time. The smoke was dense and suffocating. Some oil-soaked waste from the engine-room started it, said Cheyne. The men did well; so did most officers. When I got out, after the fire, my lungs were full of this vile stuff. 'Twas that that made me so sick next day. There were a few minutes in which I lost consciousness. It seems they hauled me out by the heels, and the doctors had some trouble fetching me round. Cheyne and I were first in—it was our business, and he, too, toppled over toward the last. The

Court of Inquiry is sitting now, and it looks as though the chief engineer would come in for a scoring. He's a surly, truculent Scotch-Englishman, and Cheyne says he must have been drinking on this voyage. Next evening after the fire I was sitting out on the hurricane deck with Cheyne, everybody else being on the promenade or else below. We heard the chaff and comment between the youngsters in the cavalry squadron and some of my junior officers, and Crabbe came in for comment.

"He was scared into the lee scuppers," said young Rafferty, of my battalion, and then came something I couldn't hear, and Cheyne and I quit our seats and walked out on the bridge beyond earshot, but he had heard and looked queerly at me. "They don't seem to like Lieutenant Crabbe," said he presently. "And I—well—I don't wish to say anything about your officers, colonel, but that man strikes me as being a mischief-maker, to say the least."

I like Cheyne. He's a seaman of the old school, but he doesn't like his job or his ship or his engineer, and I'm more than afraid he's going to resign and go back to 'Frisco. He can get a better berth, he says, with little delay. Well, there goes four bells—2 A. M.—and the lights are dancing on the rising tide. I've written to Shafto, and now must turn in. This is your one long

letter for '99. May we meet in the flesh, and that right soon. Mrs. and Miss Belden both desire to be cordially remembered. Mrs. Belden was really affable at tiffin. She has seldom appeared at table during the voyage, preferring the seclusion of her cabin (*mal de mer* does play havoc with women of uncertain age), but Mrs. Hill has been a delightful companion.

Yet I wish the voyage was over and our passenger list ashore at Manila.

Yours as ever,

LANGHAM.

U. S. TRANSPORT "AMANUENSIS,"

MANILA, November 20th, 1899.

DEAR GRIDLEY:

Major Blake, of your old regiment, who came out in command of the squadron, said the reason this ship was named the *Amanuensis* was that she wasn't self-righting. He's a bird! I used to hear Baker and Briggs and others talk of him at Minneconjou, never dreaming that the time would come when I should be commanding officer to a fellow who had held a commission since before I was born.

Thank God I had such officers and men, for while I might have been young for a lieutenant colonel when we left Honolulu, I'm old enough now for anything at

the top, and all because we barely escaped going to the bottom.

It was a dismal voyage for a fact. Cheyne resigned, as I expected, at Honolulu, and his first officer took charge; a fair seaman, probably, but not the commander Cheyne was. Some of the women, too, were wise and stayed behind (the Hills among them, to Kitty Belden's grief) so as to come in ahead. But many of the number, including our old friends, stood by the ship. Things went from bad to worse in the engine-room from the day we started, and reached their climax when, after passing the volcano, and near east longitude 130, we struck a typhoon. Don't expect me to describe it. Most of the men showed splendid nerve. So did many of the women, though they were as a rule strapped in their berths. But the engines "petered" and we could hardly keep her head on to the tremendous seas. The chief engineer flopped, as Cheyne said he would, and then got full and defied the new captain. He's been locked in his stateroom with a sentry over him ever since. Officers and men had to work at the pumps when it was all they could do to keep a footing. Three seamen and four boats were washed away. The bridge was smashed. No food except hardtack could be served out for nearly three days, and in the midst of the racket Blake was hurled across the deck and broke a

leg. Several more were badly injured, but our friend Crabbe is sound. He never showed outside his cabin door. We limped in past Corregidor this morning, and Belden was out in a steam launch to meet us before we were near our anchorage. The Hills had arrived on the *Arizona*, and told of meeting nasty weather and seeing what must have been the tail of a typhoon. He had almost given up, and his face was a sight when he saw theirs.

Belden may have been hearing tarradiddles, but he rather took me aback by the warmth of his manner when he went over the side at sunset. Mrs. Belden was exhaustively expressive, too. I don't know what to think of Kitty. She came out like a little heroine in the height of the storm, and went back like a little clam when we got in safe soundings. And now they're gone, and I'm feeling used up. Belden says you are far to the north beyond the railway, and that there's work ahead for all of us. Our men are to disembark in the morning. At last we are here! Now, for business! I hope and pray it's with Lawton.

Yours as ever,

LANGHAM.

MANILA, November 21.

DEAR GRIDLEY:

My wife and daughter reached me in safety yesterday after a terrible voyage in a veritable tub, and I'm writing this to you because I think you should know from me what you will never hear from Langham—what an out-and-out soldier, sailor, commander, and *man* he has proved himself to be. Sheller, Blake (poor fellow, there's no campaigning for him, I fear; his left leg is broken in two places), the ship's officers, as well as many of the command, say Langham never lay down for sixty-eight hours; never lost his head or hope; was cool, resolute, master of the situation all through, and has more than justified everything you ever said or thought of him. Mrs. Belden is still feeling the effects of the trying experience, but she says what they all say, that Langham was everything. She and Kitty join me in cordial regards. I am proud of Kit and what they tell me of her. We shall be here, at least *they* will, for several weeks. My regiment is not yet in shape to take the field. Between ourselves, old friend, I haven't the field officers I wish I had. Why didn't you go in for volunteer rank? Langham and his three majors are models, so their colonel declares, and I know he was opposed to Langham at the start. I own, too, that I may have been unjust to him in—certain

ways. But there is no denying his splendid qualities as an officer.

Yours sincerely,

BELDEN.

To Captain James Gridley, —th Cavalry,
Pangasinan or Beyond:

MANILA, November 25.

DEAR GRIDLEY:

Things are moving. To the disgust and disappointment of nine out of ten of our officers, the regiment is ordered to detachment duty in the Camarines, with prospects of Sámar. The general frankly says it will be scattered all over the provinces, company by company. The field officers will be fifty-fifth wheels to a coach. Belden's fellows are in far better luck. They go out to Lawton's division. I have talked the matter over with Colonel Goodman, who is all the name implies. He is quite as cut up as I am—as are his majors three—but he's a soldier, a West Pointer, and can't say anything, and mustn't. The majors are as badly off as he, but they've either got to go and command one-company posts in measly little bamboo villages, with never a chance of seeing their battalion together, or a day of real campaigning, or else pull wires for other duty. The colonel agrees with me: If I wish to see service it must be with some field column, and

he approves my applying for such duty. We're to see the chief at eleven to-day. He has been most kind since the *Amanuensis* story got out, though the engineer skipped away to Hong Kong and says he means to make an international affair of it if I don't put up a thousand pounds hush money forthwith. Barton, who was my adjutant, swears that he saw him and Crabbe campaigning together aboard the *Esmeralda* just before she sailed. I have not set eyes on Crabbe since we arrived. The old regiment is under orders for Sámar, and Crabbe, who missed Zapote Bridge and half a dozen other keen scrimmages, must go with them. So he's making the best of his time meanwhile. The Beldens are guests of General and Mrs. Gillette, down Malate way, and I have seen them driving each evening on the Luneta since we landed, Crabbe usually in close attendance. That man has pertinacity in love and hate, I fancy.

I went there to call, but, while the elders are most cordial, I am completely out with Kitty. You have no idea how she has changed. A beauty? Yes, but such a willful piece of coquetry! Well, you wouldn't believe it was our Kitty of Minneconjou days. Actually I feel snubbed six times a minute—Crabbe's doing, possibly, yet how can she put up with that cad?

You know all about the Luneta, so I shan't describe,

but how so many men can be content to be dawdling about so many carriages, when there's so much going on in every direction in the field, passes my comprehension. Blake grins over the sight from a balcony window, with his leg in splints and his jaw in a sling (he says to keep him from swearing), and the veteran is having the time of his life abusing the war department, the transport service, the hospital corps, and matters in general. I'm quartered with him until matters are decided. He is twice my age, and yet a good deal of a boy. One thing only has received favorable mention at his hands. Miss Belden came riding by last evening in khaki and hat, on an English horse and saddle, and the long-legged old dragoon said: "There's the one picture I've seen that makes this life endurable, but *look* at Crabbe!" He was straddling a Filipino pony six sizes too small for him, with a McClellan saddle six sizes too big for the pony. Here's the colonel, so we must go.

6 P. M.

It's settled! I'm to take dispatches and the gunboat *Plattsburg*, land somewhere along the coast line of Ilocos Sur, and find the cavalry column anywhere inland, reporting to the general commanding for such duty as he may decide. Good-by to the 3—th for a time, at least; I'm going for a trooper. Oh, for Gordon and Cham-

pion! We sail at daybreak, and if you and I don't meet within a month, it will be no fault of

Yours as ever,

LANGHAM.

P. S.—A letter from Mrs. Bullard followed me from 'Frisco. She says Mr. Bullard is much as usual. They have no serious money anxieties, though, of course, his investments have suffered. In answer to my questions as to whether she lost anything that evening, she says she wore no jewelry, of course, and had nothing she could lose but her hat, crop, or handkerchief. Her hat was ruined, her crop somewhat smashed, but the wrecks went with her up the range. She never missed the handkerchief. It was in the saddle pocket. She asks me to deliver a message to Kitty Belden, who is going to the dance at the Lawtons' to-night. I have too much to do 'twixt now and sailing time. No dance for me.

CHAPTER I

MANILA AND THE GENERAL'S BALL.

FOR a man with too much to do to prevent his attending a dance at the division general's, Lieutenant Colonel Langham put in rather a good part of the night. The captain of the port, a genial sailor of the old school, had arranged to send his field kit to the ship as soon as it could be trundled over to the office on the north side. The captain of the *Plattsburg* had met him at headquarters in the Ayuntamiento and told him the officer of the deck would be notified of his coming, and all he had to do was get aboard before dawn. At 8.15 the quartermaster's people had called for his kit. At 9.30, in immaculate white uniform, the bearer of dispatches-to-be was driving over to the Puente Ayala, and his tiny *cochero* and pugnacious little team were speedily swallowed up in a seething maelstrom of other teams, vehicles, and *cocheros* in the paved and graveled court of the beautiful old Spanish residence on the banks of the Pasig. Army, navy, and civil society, American, seemed out in goodly numbers, though the affair was in no sense formal. But a famous Filipino orchestra was

playing delightful waltz music as Langham ascended the broad stairway to the second story, and thirty couples, at least, were revolving and reversing—men and women both in cool, white raiment, as a rule. The dancing floor was admirable, the scene was of gladness, peace, and beauty.

Langham paid his respects to the hostess and to the fair women receiving with her; chatted a moment or two with Mrs. Hill, who was not slow to note that his eyes and thoughts were wandering; watched the dancers, most of them strangers to him; bowed, after a third attempt to catch Kitty Belden's laughing glance as she went floating by, waltzing with an appreciative A. D. C. of the commanding general, and finally felt himself seized by the elbows from behind and bidden in deep, tragic, and commanding tone to "Brace, sir; promptly!" It was Topsy Hill, as he knew at the instant, and Topsy, merry, mischievous, irresponsible, was applying old cadet methods to his unconsciously drooping carriage, his spirits having gone to his shoulders. It was good to look in Topsy's blithe, winsome, welcoming face. Besides, she was Kitty Belden's "inseparable," and he had not seen her to speak to except for one crowded moment on the Luneta. He whirled about and seized the little hands that had squared his elbows, and dropped one to shake

hands with the subaltern escort, whose name escaped him, and who didn't like it that a man with a "Mex. commission" should take up so much of her time, attention, and—hands. He told her so when finally he managed to lead her away, and got this for his answer:

"Pat Langham! Thinking of me! You lunatic! Just look at him! He has forgotten us both already. He hasn't a thought for any soul on earth but Kitty Belden!"

All of which was precisely true.

At 10.15, seeing Miss Belden seated for a moment while her partner was foraging, Langham ventured across the floor, and she saw him coming, without seeing *him*, and she talked over her shoulder, through the open casement, to a girl on the balcony. Crabbe, too, was on guard, and sped to her side. Crabbe reached her quite as soon as Langham, and stood close at hand, while she, very pleasantly, returned the New Yorker's greeting and asked if he were still feeling any ill effects from the voyage. Langham knew Crabbe was at his elbow, and as Crabbe for weeks had ignored him, he took no notice whatever of Crabbe. But he would not in Crabbe's presence mention Mrs. Bullard, therefore withheld for the time the message.

"I came to see if you had one dance for me, Miss Belden."

"Rather late, isn't it, Mr.—Colonel Langham? How is it, Mr. Crabbe; have we one left we can give—the colonel?"

The voice and manner were sweet as Persian sherbet—iced, but the words were enough to make Langham bite his lip. She seemed bent on using her queendom to compel him to appeal to her escort, the objectionable, but this Langham would not do. He turned slightly, bowed formally, said "Good-evening, Mr. Crabbe," ignoring entirely Crabbe's air of possession, and possible dispensation. For answer to the very superfluous question, Crabbe held forth to her the little engagement card with every space initial-scrawled—principally with his own. "Quite filled, you see," said Miss Kitty, beaming radiantly up into his darkening eyes. She was looking "intentionally beautiful," as Mr. Howells expressed it, and Langham knew it.

"I haven't much luck," he said, with abundant self-command. He was thinking, though, of one fierce night at sea when, at the fag end of the typhoon, for just one minute, with the wild wind and the whirling spray beating into that same exquisite face, it had gazed up into his with appeal, with faith, with so utterly different a light in the brave, beautiful eyes—when her hands had clasped one instant about one arm, while the other arm had seized

and drawn and held her to his side, and the mountain wave that burst at the quarter and deluged the deck, hissed harmlessly by. Crabbe was flat on his back in a berth below, but now, as Crabbe would have put it, he was "on deck" again.

She expected Langham to take the card and comment on the imposing frequency with which "E. T. C." appeared as claimant, but he would not, nor would he stand and be trifled with for Crabbe's benefit. Nor would he rejoice the soul of Crabbe by letting him see how her trifling had stung him.

"I should have known how it would be," said he, with exasperating civility. "Next time I'll—know better." And then—Kitty had not looked for this—he bowed, turned to his left, and was effusively greeting a lackadaisical fellow passenger she had never before seen him treat with more than common courtesy. Down in the depths of an aching, raging, rebellious little heart, the girl admired him for it, even as she raged, quite as much as she did that awful night on the *Amannensis* when he seemed so splendidly unconcerned. And this was simply abominable in him, yet nothing to what was still to come. She meant him to beg for part of a dance, and to give him all of one of Crabbe's, but he begged for nothing. He had actually gone over and was talking now to her mother.

Then Kitty suddenly bethought herself of something she wished to say to her mother, and, rising, signaled to Crabbe, who had been narrowly watching.

"It is our dance," he said, and led her away, unresponsive, unresisting. She thought to stop when opposite her mother's chair. Crabbe purposely kept her away. She finally said, breathing quickly for her, "Over by mamma, please." Crabbe was unaccountably thick-headed, and worse. He bumped into a better dancer, the aid-de-camp referred to, and stopped, all contrition, to apologize to that gentleman and his partner. Langham was gone by the time they reached Mrs. Belden; so was Kitty's desire to see her, and Crabbe failed not to note it.

"His Highness is trying to get out of going with his regiment to Sámar, or somewhere," said he, as they strolled to the balcony.

"That doesn't seem—like him," said Miss Kitty wearily.

"It's so. They are to sail next week, and he was at the Ayuntamiento twice to-day. Wants something soft here in town, probably."

No answer. Kitty's eyes were on the star-reflecting surface below her, the swift running Pasig. Several naval officers were among the dancers. A steam launch

and two men-of-war boats were moored at the river wall. The Jackies were lolling about them. The night was very still without, and the music had died away. Some of the guests were going, and people were flocking about the grand salon and stairway, leaving these at the balcony almost deserted. One or two blissful pairs were cooing softly in the darkness, but Kitty could not coo and would not allow it in Crabbe. Jovial voices rose from the court below. Adieus were being exchanged. Three or four navy fellows were hurrying back to their ship. Half a dozen soldiers had flocked down to see them off. Jackies, with boat hooks, stood at the bows, alert coxswains at the stern sheets. Oars were tossed in one glistening white cutter as the graceful craft danced out upon the waters, two officers waving their white caps in farewell. The steam launch backed swiftly out from the wall and turned her nose westward. "Good-by, colonel. Good luck!" was shouted from the shore. "Good-by, Langham! God bless you!" sang another rich, resonant voice—her father's, and Kitty Belden sprang to her feet, Crabbe again watching narrowly.

Borne on the breast of the swift-ebbing tide, the jaunty craft darted away down stream, lost in a moment, but for their lanterns, in the deep shadows toward the suspension bridge. Kitty watched until they had disappeared, her

hand touching the railing; then turned; looked one moment into the scowling face of her escort. "Let us go," said she; yet, never waiting for him, hurried straight across the shining floor to her mother's side. Colonel Belden was still below. It was Colonel Sheller who, plying the fan for the benefit of the matron, looked admiringly up into the face of the maid.

"Why has—why have they gone and where?" faltered Kitty.

"The navy men? Only the *Plattsburg's*—she's ordered off—somewhere," was Mrs. Belden's vague reply.

"But, Colonel Langham was with them."

"Yes," said Sheller. "Pat's given us the slip. We had planned a dinner in his honor. He's gone to join the cavalry column away to the north. It's the last we'll see of him for many a day."

That night, long after the dancers had gone to dream-land, Lieutenant Crabbe sat solus on the broad veranda of the Army and Navy Club, gazing out upon the westward heavens, studded with their brilliant stars. He had driven home in attendance upon the ladies, Kitty huddled in silence and a dark corner of the little carriage, Mrs. Belden and her hostess chatting briskly. If he had hoped for a word with the girl he so hungrily loved and so persistently followed, he was doomed to disappointment.

She sprang out, scarcely touching his extended hand; scurried away up the marble stair to the salon floor, and it was that keen-eyed social strategist, the general's wife, who confronted him with, "Thank you *so* much, Mr. Crabbe. Now, where shall Manuel drive you?" Even Mrs. Belden's good-night thanks had been brief and perfunctory, for her eyes followed her child. Crabbe read the symptoms aright and took communion with himself in solitude and bitterness of spirit. He was face to face with his fate now, and he knew it. If he could not turn that girl's heart to himself, he must turn it away from that other far too fortunate man. There was only one week left him. There was only one way.

CHAPTER II

THROUGH THE ENEMY'S LINES.

SIGNALS from shore! Strange smokes puffing skyward, the *Plattsburg* had moored out in the roadstead and her boat landed a little party at the beach. Two miles away to the east, peering over the low fringe of bamboo, the storm tower of a church, the gray cornice of some public building, betrayed the existence of a town of goodly size. Two miles away to the west, swinging at anchor on the glistening bay, the jaunty lines of the gunboat, dull-hued in their leaden war paint, alone broke the level of the horizon. Aloft the skies were almost cloudless; yet faint, blue-white wisps of vapor hung about the distant roofs and walls and feebly dragged along the crest of the intervening trees. Close at hand the only sound was the smothered boom of the surf and the hiss of briny foam, charging, snow-capped, up the strand, then seething back to meet the onward rush of its follower. Drowned in the dull monotone other sounds, distant sounds failed to reach the straining ears of the blue-jackets tumbling up the beach, their rifles at ready. Not a soul was in sight to challenge their

advance. The dazzling white parapet beyond the beaten, brine-soaked sands at the shoreline held not a sign of lurking foe. The Jackies halted at their signal and, kneeling, waited in extended rank the decision of their officer. The boat's crew, some knee-deep in the rush of the seas, looked curiously on. Beyond the heaping ridges of tiny shell and pebble lay, far-spreading, a boggy plain, carpeted with coarse, salt grass; beyond this, a good mile away, the thick hedge of bamboo, curtaining the further landscape like impenetrable screen; beyond this only the clump of gray towers and cornice, and a belvidere or two of the otherwise invisible town; beyond these and afar, the blue, irregular line of distant mountain. Curving in long crescent, its concave to the west, the frothing shore faded into a misty void. Seaward, blue, sparkling, flashing, and in places capped with snow, the waters of the shallow bay melted into the broad bosom of the China Sea. It was December, and the afternoon sunshine blazed hotly down upon a shadeless beach that, save for the scuttling sand crabs and a batch of alert, silent men-of-war's men and their officer, showed no sign of life.

“Well, there's your town, colonel, and here's the rendezvous, and devil a troop do I see, friend or foe.” It was the navy's report to the army—the lieutenant to

the lieutenant colonel, and the latter looked "nonplussed." Telegrams had been sent from the Ayuntamiento in Manila to the commanding officer at Dagupan, the northward end of the railway, directing him to send couriers after the cavalry column, bidding the column "feel to the left," and look out for a strong Insurgent force reported edging between it and the seashore towns of Iloeos; also for dispatches by the *Plattsburg*, coasting northward in search of their flankers. Three days had she coasted without sign of a hail from shore and now, in sight of those distant, vapor-fringed roofs of that bamboo-curtained town, Colonel Langham declared he must lose no more time. There was a "Yanko" garrison there, caring for the sick and wounded of the column searching through the eastward mountains, and Langham declared he meant to make his way thither without more ado.

But how strange that, with American soldiery not two miles away, there should be not one of their number here to exchange greetings with an American crew! From the bridge of the *Plattsburg* the church tower and the roofs of several large stone buildings were in view. So was the little patch of storm flag, fluttering in the faint breeze.

From the town and from those roofs, and the little look-

outs thereon, the gunboat in the offing must be quite as distinctly visible to anyone on watch, yet, unless the smoke could be considered, not a sign or signal had been exchanged. Langham had confidently assured the ship's commander of his ability to get through to town, and that commander had no reason to doubt it. Still, caution prescribed a landing party. The landing party had discovered nothing. Langham and his field kit were deposited there upon the booming coast line of Ilocos Sur, and not a soul was there to greet him, either as friend or foe, and the *Plattsburg* had other matters to attend to farther north. "Better get back to the ship," said the navy, and two minutes more the ship itself was signaling. Whether Langham went back or no, the lieutenant would have to, taking his men with him.

Then came a shout from the outermost Jacky, a leveled rifle and a demand to "Come in out of that!" All eyes turned to the south, and there, from behind a little clump of bushes, an odd little object hove in sight—a native in fragmentary *camisa* and voluminous hat—a hat the shape and size of a wooden mince-meat bowl, and the rest of his costume was fishnet. Covered by the inquisitive rifle, he came shambling in, trembling a bit and very polite. The army and navy both went forward to meet him, and were agreeably surprised to find that he could

speak Spanish, at least as much as they could, and now the situation was explained.

The reason no comrade appeared to greet the American arrival was that every comrade in town was virtually a prisoner. The field column, scouring the mountains for the fugitive Aguinaldo and the sailor captives in the hands of the foe, had stripped the coastwise towns of the major part of their garrisons. The alert and friendly natives, discovering this fact, had promptly assembled in overwhelming force. The town, with its available fighting men, perhaps fifty in number, guarding two hundred and fifty sick and wounded, was compassed round about by at least a thousand Tagalog warriors, variously armed, but inspired with a single purpose—the annihilation of the American garrison. It boded ill for the little command. There were two thousand native soldiers within twenty miles' radius of that church tower, and not a vestige of relief column anywhere. The *Plattsburg* lieutenant decided that this was news his commander ought to have at once. He and his people tumbled into their cutter and pulled away, leaving Langham alone on the beach. It was his own fault. He would stay.

Then a queer thing happened. No sooner was the dancing boat well out beyond the surf line and pulling swiftly for the ship, than white-garbed forms began to

exude from the distant thicket of bamboo, from behind a low bank southward, from sand dunes half a mile up shore, and cautiously, but with concerted interest, these forms closed in on the spot where Langham and his piscatorial informant squatted on the sand were discussing the possibilities. In ten minutes other fisher folk by swarms began to arrive, men and boys, women and pickaninnies.

Langham looked out over the swarthy throng and then at his watch, and the dark faces brightened with keen interest at sight of that beautiful pocket piece, and the circle grew smaller, whereat Langham looked for the *Plattsburg* and couldn't see her because of the interposing forms, some in snowy white *ropas*, some in mere shreds. So he stowed that pocket piece and casually drew forth another glistening object, a vicious-looking, nickel-plated revolver; and, motioning aside a segment of the circle, shouldered through till he came to the edge of the waters—they could not so easily surround him there—then awaited developments.

And the *Plattsburg* had seen and up-anchored and was feeling a way slowly shoreward, to come, if possible, within supporting distance, and another boatload shoved off and was bounding toward him with bending oars and spray-flashing prow, and the curious crowd began

to jabber and drift back. The forward oarsmen sprang overboard into the surf as they neared the beach and heaved their boat ashore, and a young officer in the stern sheets presented the captain's compliments to Colonel Langham, and would he please come aboard, and then Langham, who had been listening hand to ear, inclined his head again to the east, and so did others. A fleecy mist was drifting above the bamboo tops and a shifting land breeze brought to their ear a faint sputter and crackle. The besiegers had scented the possible coming of a relieving force and were making effort to "rush" the garrison before the setting of the sun now low toward the horizon.

Langham looked about him. One native had come on his pony, and was eagerly watching proceedings. The soldier ladled banknotes and silver, fifty *pesos*, into his campaign hat, and lunging through to the horse holder, offered the money for the beast. The native eyed the money eagerly, but shook his head. The sun went lower. The naval contingent grew impatient. "Take my kit back to the ship," said Langham, "and my compliments to the captain. I'm going to get through to that town this night," and the rest was lost in the startled plunging of the little steed, for, shoving the native owner aside, Langham's long legs had clamped the mite of a saddle,

the stirrups banging his leggings not a hand below the knee. "There's your *dinero!*" he shouted to the jabbering circle; whirled the pony about, drove him clear of the crowd, then faced them, revolver in hand.

And in disapprobation of such high-handed outrage, doubtless, the sun went down and hid itself behind the westward wave, as the *Plattsburg's* boat pulled back to the ship, and two horsemen now—a tall Yankee whose toes nearly swept the ground, a shivering little Tagalog at the point of a pistol and the top of his pony's speed—went scampering southward to the mouth of the estuary. As darkness settled down and the tiny cook-fires of the besiegers began to gleam through the timber, the two were heading eastward, making for the walls of the town.

It was a piece of cold-blooded effrontery, the like of which the native Filipino had probably never conceived. In the dusk and the gloaming, in silence and now at cautious pace, they moved on side by side, for Langham held the reins of both ponies in his left hand, while the right kept the revolver at the small of the Tagalog's back. In his khaki field dress the officer was little more distinguishable than the guide. They passed near occasional groups of native soldiery squatted about their cook-fires, but not a sentry hailed them. They rode within fifty paces of a post of the guard where forty men

were drawn up in line, their rifles at the "order." They passed within speaking distance of two or three horsemen riding swiftly by, and still no one molested, no one hindered. It grew darker every moment, with that swift on-coming of night so marked in the tropics. The roadway through the bamboo was like a tunnel, but for the twinkle of the stars overhead. They came upon a little picket post, the men under arms and staring out to the front across open rice fields. Everybody they passed seemed looking for the coming of something from the direction of town. There were the nipa walls and thatches of the outskirts only a hundred yards ahead. Nobody seemed to bother about anyone coming from the rear. It was now that danger could, indeed, be looked for. The last line of Insurgent outposts was reached, and the stupid, upturned faces of the two sentries at the narrow, high-arching bridge expressed no thought of hindrance—only dull surprise as the ponies jogged doggedly by, both with back-set ears. Langham's heart may have been beating like a trip, but his teeth were set and his eyes fierce with determination. One hundred yards beyond the bridge, and there lay the open road into the heart of the town, flanked at the outskirts by deserted "shacks" of bamboo. There, at last, he tossed the reins; and bade his shaking guide look out for him-

self; bent low over his pony's neck and, urging him forward, listening eagerly for the challenge of lurking sentry, dreading the flash of low-aimed rifle, still drove eagerly on. The plaza opened before him, long pistol shot way. Dim lights shone at door and window. The huge bulk of the stone church loomed across the dim, deserted square, and then at last it came, clear, sharp, and sudden, snapping on the night like the lash of a whip: "Halt! Who's *there?*" And, jerked to his haunches, the pony's hoofs ploughed up a dust cloud, as Langham's voice fairly thundered the answer:

"American officer—from the sea!"

Then at last the strain was over, and the daring feat was done. Ten minutes later he was shaking hands with the commander and his few wearied officers. No wonder they had not seen the *Plattsburg*. Every roof, every window of the church tower had been swept clean by the fierce fire of the besiegers. No lookout could have lived a moment while the daylight lasted. Now, lantern in hand, they went clambering to the tower, and before eight bells had sent their tinkling chime across the waters the anxious watchers on the gallant ship saw through their night glasses the tiny, waving spark that told through four miles of black darkness, across intervening roof and thicket, swamp and strand and sea, that, daring

death, their passenger had pierced the Insurgent lines and borne his message of support and cheer. That night the sick and despondent took fresh courage, for were not the blue-jackets close at hand, waiting only for the dawn? That night, a few hours later, the Insurgent swarms began to slink away; to secrete their rifles and revolvers in the hollow of many a bamboo; to busy themselves again in shop and school and field, for out to the east the big horses came floundering through the mud roads, for strange trumpet calls were singing through the forests and echoing over the plantations, and when at dawn "Pat" Langham guided a little scouting party back toward the bridge he crossed at dusk, they stirred up a swarm of protesting *amigos*, eager to announce the swift coming of *caballos* and *caballeros* by the score, and so it happened that in this distant, almost unknown province of far Luzon, within sight of the China Sea, two old comrades who, two years before on the banks of the Hudson, sorrowing had said adieu, now met face to face once more, with eager rescuers shouting joyous greeting to the grinning and responsive rescued, and Jim Gridley, bending down from saddle, threw a blue-shirted, clasping arm around Langham's neck. There are things in soldier life worth living for. There are some things in soldier life worth dying to attain.

CHAPTER III

BAD NEWS FROM SAMAR.

THEN followed the swift mid-winter campaign that scattered to the four winds the army of Aguinaldo, and drove him, helpless and almost deserted, to a refuge in the mountain wilds of the eastern shore. Cutting loose from their supplies, the American columns, horse and foot, dove into the canebrake; waded swamp and morass; swam turbid streams; clambered mountain trails, pressing the fleeing foe at every point, driving him from trench to trench, capturing arms, supplies, records, prisoners, at every turn. The family and treasury of the Insurgent dictator were overtaken Christmas Day, the elusive chief escaping only by the sacrifice of all he held dear. The gallant young general, his escort commander, Gregorio del Pilar, striving vainly at every pass to stem the indomitable charge of the long-legged, sinewy "Yankos," died at last on the fighting line, that his leader might live. Into the fastnesses of the hills probed the insistent pursuers wherever went the scattering natives, one little command recapturing brethren of the navy, long held prisoners and driven like cattle

before their almost savage guardians; another releasing hundreds of haggard Spaniards; the general "prosecution" resting only when every pass and trail had been explored, every town and depot had been surrendered, every semblance of organized opposition had melted away. They suffered much, yet it was as nothing in the light of what they accomplished. They rejoiced much in the words of praise with which the commanding general rewarded their services. They swore considerably, long weeks later, over the words of censure in the anti-administration press, and wondered why "giving aid and comfort to the enemy" was punishable only in their case and not in journalism. They grieved unspeakably in the one great loss of the campaign. All eyes were filled, all hearts were burdened, when the word was passed that Lawton would never lead them again. The dawn of the new century found them scattered all over the northern provinces of Luzon, searching hither and yon for hidden arms and ammunition, but with their heavier battling done. And all these weeks of stir and strife and peril Langham had lived with headquarters in the field, serving his new general as eagerly, loyally, zealously as that brilliant and tireless leader served their commander in common and in chief, and in all these miles of weary marching and sudden attack, time and

again he and the faithful comrade of Minneconjou days were thrown together, and the friendship that began in the foothills of the Sagamore Range of the far Dakotas waxed and welded stronger here in the swamps and jungles, the mountain trails of wild Luzon.

There was little time for talk—scant opportunity for confidences. Never until the campaign was nearly done, then only by accident, did the brigade commander hear the story of the non-self-righting '*Manuensis*. Never until long weeks later still did that dignified soldier hear the story of Langham's daring dash through the Insurgent lines to join the beleaguered garrison. He had completed then his report of the campaign, but the navy had seen and heard, and, finding it unmentioned in army chronicles, the navy came out with the tale that Langham had never told.

Then came a summons to the south. The insurrection, crushed in the upper provinces, was spreading in the lower. Regulars and volunteers, the regiments were heading for the shores of Sámar, Mindanao, and Panay. The 3—th had seen some weeks of skirmish among the jungles of the Camarines. There was bitter work ahead against the savage hosts that lurked in mountain fastnesses beyond the reach of landing parties and from those safe coverts swooped down upon the settlements

and scattered depots of supplies, ambushing couriers, waylaying small parties and striving to lure in larger detachments the soldiery of the seaside camps into the tangle of the wilderness. Time had come when these wild islanders, too, should be taught the error of their ways.

The 3—th had once more assembled with the colors, and its field officers were restored to their appropriate commands. The war that was over in the north seemed only opening in the south. The first of March found Langham once again in Manila, outfitting for another mountain campaign, and with him this time came his chum and constant friend, "Grim Jidley," as they whimsically called him now; the silent, steadfast, indefatigable fellow whose squadron, because of his active and indomitable leadership, had given him still another distinctive name, "Old Tough and Tireless." But grim, tough, and tireless though he might be, Gridley could not go on forever. A Mauser bullet had split the pommel of his Whitman just as he was mounting, and, while missing vein or artery, had ripped a furrow in the thigh and spoiled for a time his grip in saddle. The general had him bamboo-raftered down to Vigan, and thence to the sea, where the navy took him over the side and into their hearts, and away to Manila, where they rowed him

up the Pasig to the shelter of the First Reserve, where Langham could see him daily, and where he speedily got well enough to be anxious to return straightway to his fellows in the field.

This Langham was combating with all his force, despite the fact that his own kit was even then aboard the *Sumatra* and his order signed to join the regiment at Catbalógan, and James the Silent was gravely listening as he reclined in his easy wicker chair, when Dr. Bliss came smirking into the breezy sanctuary, screened off on the veranda, and without a word of warning ushered in two ladies—Mrs. and Miss Belden, whom both officers believed at the moment to be in Iloilo—who had indeed but the day before returned from there, who had been told of Gridley's arrival and Langham's departure, and, not expecting to see the latter (for even Bliss did not happen to know of his presence) there was unmistakable flutter all round.

Kitty Belden's lovely face went from rose pink to red, then almost white. Langham, seated astride a hospital chair, with his arms along its top, his breast against his arms, his legs sprawled full length, his back to the door—arms, back, and legs all in glistening white—never saw the visiting trio until the light in Gridley's hollow-cheeked, square-chinned visage told the story.

Then up sprang the campaigner, down went the chair, and, with one quick glance over his shoulder, the tall lieutenant colonel, looking thinner than ever after the months of hardship and privation, stepped quickly aside, squarely intimating that he considered Gridley to be the object of their visit, and solidly placing himself in the background. To him Mrs. Belden bowed hurriedly, yet with something like appeal in her eyes, as with outstretched hands she swept by to greet Captain Gridley, for his part vainly struggling to rise. The maneuver left nobody between Langham and the daring, darling Kitty of two years ago, and she *had* to lift up her eyes and meet the questioning gaze in his. For seventeen weeks no word or message had passed between them. Instinctively feeling her knees trembling beneath her, the girl had put forth a hand and rested it on the little table. Her sleeve, her handkerchief—something—dislodged the letter that was lying there, face down, close to the edge. It fell, face upward, at her feet, and glad of any excuse to avert, if only for a moment, the meeting for which she was so utterly unprepared, she swooped upon it, quick, agile, graceful, and recognized the superscription at a glance. It was addressed to Lieutenant Colonel William P. B. Langham, U. S. V., Manila, and it had come straight from Long Island and—her. So they were

corresponding still! Kitty laid it, face down, just where first she had seen it, and then faced him unflinchingly.

Even after that perilous voyage; even after that wonderful night when he had held her for one moment close strained to his breast while the great billow tore its way astern and the storm swept eastward in its wrath; even after she must have felt the wild throbbing of his heart that girl had looked up smiling into his face, and for response to his invitation, had dared to turn indifferently to a man he held in contempt and ask that man if "we" had anything to give Mr.—Colonel Langham. Even now, as she confronted him, gamely, but with who could say what effort, Langham saw her again as she looked in saucy triumph that evening at the Lawtons', heard again the languid insolence of the tone with which she turned to Crabbe, and though night after night and day after day he had seen and heard her, and had sworn to himself that he *would* see and hear and remember her as the girl who had so recklessly stung him—for the life of him he could not resist her beauty, her fascination, her power, now. Then and thereafter he had told himself she must have owed some allegiance to Crabbe, even to the extent of engaging herself to him. Since then, since his return to Manila, he had heard from a man whose simplest statement was like gospel truth,

that he knew she had denied herself to Crabbe from that very night; that she had sent a note to Crabbe within twenty-four hours that set him to cursing savagely; that Crabbe had been hustled off to Sorsogón, or somewhere, without so much as another word with her. His informant was Gillette's own aid-de-camp, himself a suspected victim, who, ignorant of Langham's state of mind, was indignant that Langham should profess to believe such a girl engaged to such a Crabbe.

And now here stood this "master of the situation" on the storm-tossed transport, this nervy night rider of hostile lines, staring stupidly at a sweet-faced girl as she rose again to her full height and resolutely looked him in the eye.

He had taken one quick stride forward as though to retrieve the letter; then halted short. He had succeeded in hiding from Crabbe the chagrin he felt at her denial of him, but this was self betrayal now, and he knew it and branded it as awkward, under-bred, unworthy of him and the name he bore. If only he had stepped forward and hailed her cordially, rejoicefully, as though nothing on earth had ever happened to kill their frank, jolly friendship, that would have been admirable; but, instead, he had stood quaking, with his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth.

It was all over in five seconds, but the five seconds were an hour. Mrs. Belden had whirled about as soon as she possibly could, and precipitating herself on Langham, made way for Kitty at Gridley's side, and then, when the girl had shaken hands with her trusty knight, and they had had a few joyous words—then it was easier to bring the warring souls to a semblance of a greeting. Kitty coolly said she was *so* glad to see Colonel Langham, who, somebody said—who was it, mamma?—only that very morning, had already embarked for Sámar; and Langham, with fluttering heart, had taken her cool little hand and said he was so very glad the *Sumatra* had not gone on time—she was only waiting for the *Logan's* mail. Then Kit turned back to Gridley and it was materfamilias with whom he had now to talk—shrewd, man-reading materfamilias who, as she chatted and questioned, marked his flitting eyes and faltering attention, and saw again and more clearly than before, the extent of Langham's enthrallment, and she had known long weeks it wasn't through pining for Crabbe or languishing at Iloilo that her daughter's soft cheek had thinned, her daughter's glad voice had lost its ring.

"You must come to us for tea and a good talk, Colonel Langham," said the lady, who had not seen the letter from Long Island. "Mrs. Gillette will be *so* glad to

see you again." But she could say no more, for other women were ushered in, ladies of both regiments, eager to show mercy and kindness to James the Silent, now that he was wounded, and still on the matrimonial "un-assigned list." But Kitty added no such invitation when they presently arose to go, nor did she see anyone but Bliss awaiting to escort them to their carriage. With him she chatted mercilessly, up to the very moment when the *cochero* touched his cockaded top hat and cracked his whip and released his mettlesome team. Then she barely glanced at Langham, and lightly, laughingly, nodded adieu; then beamed radiantly, sympathetically on Shannon, who came stumping suddenly into view on sprawling crutches, and her voice was imperious as she bade the carriage wait, and then honey sweet as she cooed a soft torrent of soothing questions about that wounded ankle. Shannon would have taken a shot through the other, too, could it have held her another minute, but mamma said they *must* go or be late at luncheon. And when a second time they started though there were several hovering convalescents about them, there was no more Langham. He had had enough of her coquetry for many a day.

"The *Sumatra* will not sail before dawn to-morrow. The *Logan's* only just in and all the mails have to be

sorted," said the Man-Who-Knew—the general's aid, as they sat at luncheon, but despite that fact no Langham came to tea, though Kitty Belden declined a bid to ride at four with that same aid-de-camp—not that she wished to see Langham, but she wished him to see that she neither sought nor avoided him—and when he came not to see how little she cared to see him she became capriciously insistent on driving to the Luneta to hear the music and see the people. This, when people were swarming in to see her, and of course, her mother. It was awkward, because Mrs. Belden could not well go while they kept coming. It was Mrs. Gillette who saw and who solved the problem. "If you don't mind, I'll take Kitty a little drive," said she in undertone. "She—needs it, I think." Mrs. Belden would have protested against it had it been anyone less in power and station than the wife of a major general only two places removed from supreme command in the islands. Kitty's place was here with her mother, helping entertain, was what the mother could now say only to herself. And so they went, Mrs. Gillette easily disposing of the matter by coming forth into the deep veranda arrayed for the drive, and saying comprehensively, "You're all here to see Mrs. Belden and hear of everybody she left at Iloilo, so we'll see you later on the Luneta," and then swept

Kitty with her into the carriage and away, ignoring even the appeal in the eyes of the aid-de-camp. No, she meant that seat for another man, and she meant to find him.

But Mrs. Gillette did not know about that letter—the letter that seemed so to sting and burn Kitty Belden’s fingers she could have dropped it again had not *he* stood there looking on. Crabbe had told but simple truth when he declared Langham still in correspondence with that—woman. He had told her more that also might be true—that Langham had dared to say, in so many words, after a certain night on the transport, that he had but to “whistle” and Kitty Belden would “come to heel.” It was Crabbe’s only way.

Mrs. Gillette had counted on finding Langham along the Luneta, where everybody went toward sunset, but twice they slowly drove the long circuit, passing cap-raising officers by dozen. Then madam bade her twin diminutives on the box to go on up the Paseo de Santa Lucia, past the tented fields where men in khaki spread thickly along the iron fence on one side, and officers in white strolled lazily along the graveled walk upon the other, eyeing dames and damsels—Native, Mestiza, Spanish, or American, also sauntering, and still no sign of Langham. And then Mrs. Gillette remembered suddenly

that the general had charged her to see that Captain Blade and Lieutenant Blind, sent in wounded from Cavit , should want for nothing, and once at the First Reserve, having inquired for these gentlemen, she wondered would it be possible to see Captain Gridley? and would Kitty mind going up with her? An attendant ran to ask, for Dr. Bliss was out for his brief, daily drive, and when Gridley sent word he should be delighted, they went swishing up the steps and out to his veranda, and other visitors—two officers—arose respectfully and made way for them, but there was no Langham there. He and the letter, too, were gone, as Miss Belden remarked. Probably he was answering it somewhere. Presently it came time to go, and then Mrs. Gillette casually referred to Langham. “Langham,” said impervious, thick-skinned, thick-headed Gridley, “Langham! Why, where on earth is Langham? He went out when you and Miss Belden were announced, and I supposed of course he’d run down to meet you.”

But Kitty Belden knew he had run out *not* to meet them, and when, flashing home in the fading light some thirty minutes later, she caught just one flitting glimpse of him, sitting very erect in a joggy carromata, and lifting his white cap without so much as an inclination of his stately head, she swiftly jumped to the conclusion that he

had seized that opportunity to drive down, pay his respects to mamma, to leave his card, compliments, and adieux for each of the other ladies, and would be sure to think she had been in chase of him—all of which, except thinking her in chase of him, proved warranted by the facts in the case, and Kitty Belden easily persuaded herself that night she hated Pitt Langham—just hated him, and in her fury could have scratched her own pretty eyes out—the red and swollen eyes that later gazed out over the placid waters at the dawn of the day and watched the *Sumatra* vanishing into the misty horizon about Corregidor. And now it was for no matter of months; it was a year before she again set eyes on Langham, and in that year what had not happened to drive them farther apart? What could have happened, what now could happen, that would ever bring them again together?

CHAPTER IV

DEVIL'S WORK AND ITS CURE.

IT had been a year fruitful of humiliation and disaster. Faithful to their duty and their flag, the men of the twin services, the army and the navy of the United States, had battled valiantly, until, after exceeding labor, hardship, and privation, they had crushed the insurrection and scattered the Insurgents. Then campaign orators and anti-administration papers denounced and disowned the deeds of the soldiery; revived and restored the spirit of rebellion, and the misguided natives, hearing and permitted to hear only these treasonable vaporings, believing the nation spoke and not a bigoted few, took heart and arms again, and in many a province and many a distant isle fell upon the far-separated detachments, oftentimes with fatal effect. Lawton had died in December, pierced by a bullet, as he himself had expressed it, that might as well have been aimed by one of his own people.

Everywhere over the archipelago sped the secret emissaries of Aguinaldo, scattering broadcast translations of speeches and editorials that, almost in so many words,

incited the Filipino to renewed and desperate effort. The effects became manifest in an hundred localities and innumerable ways. Couriers, hunters, mail carriers, tourists, even teachers, were waylaid and hacked to pieces. Soldiers who chased the murderers into villages found nothing there but protesting *amigos*, for whom salaaming *presidentes*, who had voluntarily taken the oath of loyalty to the United States, and in some cases were yet holding commissions in the Insurgent army, vouched as innocent of all participation in the deplorable crimes. Guides, detailed by these officials, led scouting parties into ambush, where they died fighting; directed others into narrow, tortuous trails, where the ground gave way beneath the leaders' feet and dropped them helpless to be impaled on sharpened bamboo stakes, to writhe in agony until relieved by death; deserted them in dense forests to die of thirst or starvation; delivered them into the hands of overwhelming numbers of the enemy, some to languish and linger in foul prisons, some to be entombed alive in the sands of the seashore, with the helpless head exposed to the sting of myriad insects; some to be gouged and hacked and slowly butchered in sight and hearing of pinioned comrades, powerless to help them; some to be slowly starved in sight of plenty; some, by dozens, to die by the sword in the hands of a screaming, screeching, tri-

umphant host that for long months had lived on their bounty, thrived on their gifts, rejoiced in their friendship and protection, knelt with them before the same altar, worshiped with them the same God, adored with them the same Saviour, and never by look or deed gave hint of their foul purpose until summoned to the slaughter by the bell that morn, noon, and night for many a day had called them in common to the sanctuary—and all this because high exponents of a sect out of power at home, seeking to discredit the administration in the eyes of the people, recked not what fate it might entail on those sworn to uphold the flag either at home or abroad.

“This thing has got to be stopped!” finally swore a sorely badgered general, as he read the last rueful report from a column in the field. “Here’s another scouting party trapped and boloed in the bamboo, right under the *presidente’s* nose. Can no one nail these villains?”

“You know the orders, sir,” said his staff officer dryly. “I used to think we were up against the press, the pulpit, the people, and the Indians, too, when we had our annual run for the scalp dancers, but that was a simple proposition as compared to this.”

“Seems to me, with such men as we have in the field, we ought to accomplish something,” said the official head of the most disturbed district in the ken of the chief at

Manila. "Six months' scouting and we're worse off than when we started!"

"It isn't the men—it's the measures," said the adviser, at his elbow. "It's like the orders we used to get long days ago at Laramie, when the Sioux had scalped our herders: 'Make every effort to arrest the murderers, but be sure to do nothing to excite the Indians.' There isn't a better regiment in the service than the 2—th, though Crabbe and Sparker *do* belong to it, but what can they do? What could *I* do? What could *you* do if you were turned loose in the hills yonder, with fifty men at your back, bidden to put a stop to bushwacking and bushwhackers, but be sure to do nothing to excite the fears or animosities of the people? Your men are boloed by night and volleyed by day. You charge into the bamboo and chase a lot of brown skulkers into a swarming village, where the *presidente* bows and scrapes, and swears they are *todos amigos—hermanos—Americanos*—everything that is loyal and reputable. You say that half a hundred armed *ladrones* took refuge within his bamboo walls. He politely says it is impossible, and five hundred villagers chorus impossible, too, some of them grinning in your face. Don't you suppose that *presidente* knows—and those grinning beggars know—you're forbidden to lay a hand on one of them or on anything that is his from the

church down to a chicken? You know—you're morally certain—that that church is over a magazine, that altar is an arsenal, just as we found them there about Manila in February a year ago. But the *padre* comes out and smiles benevolently and blesses you and *hijo mios* your men. You know that in that gathering crowd, in their white *ropas*, there are dozens that were shooting at you from ambush not an hour back. Your dead and your wounded are still uncared for. You are trying to carry out your orders, but you can't, because of your instructions—the one blocking the other just as the War and Interior Departments used to keep us between two fires on the Indian frontier. You know there are hundreds of Mausers and thousands of Mauser cartridges *cached* somewhere in that village. You know that *presidente* knows all about it, too, but the only way you can prove it is to rip things to pieces until you find them, and you are forbidden to rip. In short, general, the man who wins out in this kind of campaigning does it only at the risk of his commission."

"I wish," said the general reflectively, "I wish we had a few of our old-time sergeants that knew how to do things without—knowing how they did 'em."

"Those men," said the major, "belonged to the heroic age when results, not means, were of first consequence.

One thing is certain, sir, the 2—th will never get those robber bands or their arms either. They are too—conscientious, or—conservative. But,” he added suggestively, “there’re the volunteers. They’ve got to be mustered out anyhow.”

And the two veterans looked at each other across the outspread map, and presently certain wearied detachments, disgusted with their hampered and fruitless efforts, came drifting in, and presently other columns took the field, and not long thereafter other reports—very different reports—very gratifying reports—began coming to headquarters at Manila, and eyes that had long been gloomy took on a light of triumph and rejoicing; tongues that had been tied for fear of telling tales of failure or of scant success, now wagged with eager freedom, for wondrous work was this being done in the once intractable providence. Long months, through tropic heat and drenching rains and flooded streams and misty mountain trails, had the searching columns peered and plodded and “hiked” in vain. Before them vanished the wild banditti and the guerrilla bands. Nowhere found they anything but peaceable country folk or populous towns all fervent in their hatred for Aguinaldo, their love for Uncle Sam—all positive in their assurance that not an *insurrecto*, not a bandit, could be found in field, *barrio*, or

pueblo about them; yet the moment the columns disappeared, field, *barrio*, and *pueblo* would swarm with native soldiery, armed with rifles or the silent bolo; and then, here and there and everywhere, couriers would again be ambushed, sentries be transfixed with winged arrows, scouts and surveyors be found with gullets sliced; small detachments be shot down by encircling, unseen riflemen; and they who had been sent to rid the province of the scourge went handicapped with orders, dictated by a policy of mercy to all—to all but these, the silent and subordinate—orders that made them the derision of the native and the laughing stock of lookers-on of other nationalities.

Then at last there began a new dispensation. New district commanders stepped into the field, some from the regulars, some from the national volunteers. They were men chosen because of certain traits of strenuous, vehement energy that had marked them in other sections and at earlier stages of the game, and in this new dispensation the very thing Jim Gridley once wrote of as a strange possibility came to pass as a petrified fact. Colonel W. P. Langham, U. S. V., commanding the sub-district of Cabeza Grande, found four companies of the old regiment, two of them headed by Sparker and Crabbe, already encamped within the limits of his bailiwick, and now

awaiting his orders. With these and with six companies of his own regiment, the volunteers, the young commander began his work. If two or three officers proved somewhat lukewarm, the vim and determination of a dozen others, regulars and volunteers alike, more than counterbalanced. For now came thrilling tidings: First, that one lively township had turned over arms and ammunition for upwards of a hundred men; next, that the *presidente* of its nearest neighbor had surrendered the murderers of certain soldiers cut off from their column—three officers and fifty-seven of the Insurgent battalion, with all their arms and supplies; then, that his brother official, ten miles further on, had followed suit with as many more. Then more rifles and countless stock of cartridges were unearthed beneath the fine old church of Batabanga, and the sanctuary of Caringay was found to be a storehouse full of clothing, arms, and munitions of war. Then Coronel Caliente Cabeza was run down with seventy followers in a bamboo thicket that had been drawn a dozen times before without success. Then the *presidente* of the big and thriving town of Bongabing surrendered the band of Capitan Bolo Agudo, and goodness knew how much plunder with him. Incidentally the *presidente* gave up, with many apologies, his own commission as captain in the service of Aguinaldo. Then

another *presidente* led a little battalion of nimble Yankees up a twisting trail that ended in a mountain fortress and a free fight in which, sword in hand, a score of natives bit the dust and five score begged for mercy.

It was not long before town after town, that never before had owned to harboring man or musket of the Insurgent force, was eagerly delivering both into the hands of these new American leaders—leaders that looked so very like and acted so little like their predecessors; and then, at the demand of these urgent, wouldn't-be-denied invaders, even the men who had boasted of the brutal assassination of helpless victims—even the ring-leaders in many a midnight raid and murder—were run down, brought in and delivered over to the now successful and triumphant Americans.

More than one officer had won credit and high repute in this hitherto perilous and thankless duty; but the man who seemed to carry everything before him, who swept the big island from end to end until he had scourged it clean; the man whom the double-dealing and the lying learned to dread, and the would-be peaceable to rejoice in, was no less a personage than our four-o'clock-tea friend of Minneconjou days, Colonel "Pat" Langham, who, after four months of service the like of which had never before been seen in that section of the archipelago,

found himself with no more native foes to conquer, summoned to Manila to receive in person the thanks of the commanding general, but taken down with a burning fever that presently robbed him of his faculties and lured him to the confines of another world.

Then, just as Mr. Percy Shafto, some ten thousand miles away by sail or steam, was rejoicefully receiving congratulations at the club upon his nephew's daring and successful campaign, upon the glowing tribute of the press, and the recommendation of the governor general that the star of a brigadier of volunteers be given as the reward of such stirring and invaluable service; just as officers and men in the armories of Gotham's guardsmen were voicing their delight that it should be one of their own that had so forged to the front and "done what the regulars couldn't do," just as "Cousin Amy, shallow-hearted," was sending her felicitations (she wasn't the first woman to think better of an earlier rebuff when the rejected one became famous in the Philippines); just as another fair hand was sending words of cordial and genuine regard from the bedside of a babbling, broken-down old man, there came the cabled news that Colonel Langham had been landed very ill at Iloilo. Colonel Belden, commanding town, garrison, and sub-district, had had him borne from ship to shore to his own quarters in that

stately island city. Then came worse tidings still—strange tidings. All on a sudden, scare-headlined into startling prominence, came the announcement that charges of a most serious nature had been lodged against this newly discovered hero, and for a week the anti-administration press went wild with tremendous tales of sensation extraordinary. So far from deserving honor or reward, this creature of an imperialistic usurpation was a brutal bully of the lowest order; a man guilty of “high-handed outrage on the high seas,” driving a subject of Great Britain from his post of duty, ordering him to be bayoneted in the ship’s dungeon (brig?); imperiling the lives of helpless women, children, and soldiery committed to his charge; involving us in serious and embarrassing controversy with a friendly Power. (Anything to down the administration. Two weeks earlier the same papers had been howling at the president and cabinet for “truckling to John Bull.”) Then, next came “Skulking from his regiment and seeking ‘soft snaps’ when his comrades were ordered to dangerous duty.” Then, that “the colonel wouldn’t have him with the regiment, such was the hatred of the men.” All this vouched for by “officers of high rank and indisputable veracity.”

And finally and worse yet, taken up eagerly all over the land, came that gruesome story that Colonel Lang-

ham's alleged success in subduing the *insurrectos* in Cabeza Grande and adjacent region was achieved only through the cold-blooded butchery of natives, forced to act as guides in regions where they knew nothing of the trails, and by excruciating torture of peaceful, loyal, but helpless native officials, some of high station and character, several of whom had succumbed to their injuries. "Disgrace and dishonor to the nation and to the flag!" proclaimed these patriotic sheets. "The Administration Compelled at Last to Take Action!" was the next. And all this for many a day Pat Langham was spared, though poor Shafto was not, for the brutal assailant of high-minded ship's officers, the execrated of the enlisted men, the cold-blooded butcher of helpless natives, the fiendish torturer of priests and *presidentes*, lay in a delirium of his own in far-distant Panay; and for the time being at least, envy, hatred, and malice, joining hands with fever and a free and unterrified press, had our hero gagged, throttled, and down, with none so poor to do him reverence. Were there any now to do him simple justice?

CHAPTER V

BREVET LOST—A BRIDE WON.

IT seems there were. A general court-martial was ordered to assemble at Manila, P. I., on the —th day of—, 19—, for the trial of Lieutenant Colonel W. P. Langham, 3—th U. S. Volunteer Infantry, and such other officers as might properly be brought before it. The detail for that court was a matter of difficulty. Being a volunteer, the accused could properly be tried only by volunteers, and volunteers who “ranked” him. Now, these, though widely scattered in point of station, were thought to be in close accord in point of view. Some of them, West Pointers and Indian fighters of the line, chosen, because of their energy in that line, to command volunteer regiments against the Insurgent Islanders, had been heard to say that the only way to thrash Indians or Islanders was to tackle them Indian or Island fashion, which was not with gloves, or close observance of a General Order devised for use in battling a civilized and not a savage foe. Some few of them had gone so far as to profit by Pat Langham’s example. Some two or three had courts-martial of their own to face *in esse* or *in*

posse. But a court was finally found, generals and colonels in sufficient number to go on with the case, and three months after the summons to come to Manila to be commended and promoted, the lieutenant colonel lately commanding the district of Cabeza Grande appeared there in arrest—and readiness for trial.

And with him came as counsel Colonel Belden, and there to meet them, just landed from Japan, were Mrs. and Miss Belden, and if six months' sojourn among the cherry blossoms and chrysanthemums and cooling breezes could do no more for maiden bloom than they had done for silent Kitty, such sojourns should in future be discountenanced. She was paler, thinner, yet more feverish than ever, and Belden saw it with a sinking heart. Being in arrest, though with the limits of Manila and suburbs, Langham found lodgment on the bay shore in Ermita, close to the club, and there Captain Gridley came to join and comfort him. Not quite a mile to the southward, General and Mrs. Gillette still occupied their beautiful Spanish-built, substantial house, and the Gillettes would take no noes for answers. There the Beldens had to come and stay.

Within a week of their arrival, in a big and breezy room of the provost marshal's old headquarters building, the court convened in solemn session, with a score of

correspondents fringing the deep stone walls, and there, pallid, thin, weak from long illness and confinement, but with fire in his eye and fight in his heart, with dozens of silent, anxious, and generally sympathetic comrades, and not a few fair-faced women looking on, Pat Langham faced his judges and his soldier fate.

“Object to being tried by any member named in the order?” Not a bit of it; “Though something I might ‘plain,” he said (to self and counsel), of the somewhat obvious preponderance of officers who had done next to nothing in the field. How said he to the charges and their specifications? (which, after all, fell far short of those prepared or predicted by the press). Not guilty to every blessed charge. Not guilty to every specification except to one or two which alleged in brief the administering of the so-called “water cure” to a so-called *presidente*, and to these: “Guilty of the main facts as alleged, but only as a military necessity, warranted by the circumstances.” Whereat there was mild sensation.

The first thing in order was the charge of abuse of power, authority, etc., in the case of the engineer, and that bold Briton was on hand to take the oath, tell his story, and pocket his per diem, mileage, etc., which, as he came from distant Yokohama at no personal expense whatever, was no inconsiderable sum. Unblushingly he

unfolded a tale of having been, by order of Colonel Langham, forcibly dragged from his post, thrust in a prison cabin, threatened with gagging, "spread eagling," even with death; all of which was duly recorded. Then came Belden's turn, the cross-examination, and then another exposition of the ludicrous impotency of our military system as regulated by civil laws. To the chuckling glee of brother Britishers present, the witness refused to answer a question, and taunted the court with the well-known and melancholy fact that, though compelled to pay him heavily for coming and going and condescending to appear before it, it could not compel him, a civilian witness, to open his head except when he chose. It could not even punish him for expression of the contempt that he felt. Chief Engineer Entwistle, late of the *Amanuensis*, having placed on record everything he could think of to hurt the accused, declined to submit to cross-questioning that would rip both his story and reputation into shreds, and the court had no recourse in law but to pocket his insults, while he pocketed the fees. It isn't only our savage neighbors who, thanks to our legislators, have the laugh on the military arm of the nation!

But most men knew the real story of the trouble on the transport. There were officers and men available who could and did riddle the Entwistle version, to the end

that certain discharged soldiers, doing business in a small way in Manila, waited upon that burly derider of American men and methods, and something happened that compelled his remaining in the neighborhood—and indoors—until a new outfit of clothing could be obtained. Certain British residents, too, united in a letter to a steamship company that created a vacancy in the engine-room of a P. & O. Liner, and this while that unhappy court was still in session, wrestling with other and graver problems.

It was the seventh day of the case, and Lieutenant Crabbe was writhing in the witness chair. It was he, as now learned, who had given the correspondents of certain furiously antagonistic journals these reports as to Langham, and now Mr. Crabbe was trying to explain.

It had been developed in the course of the trial that, early in the reorganized campaign, Lieutenant Crabbe, sent with sixty men to search for secreted arms and ammunition in the Pueblo of Catamarán on the Pies Frios, came back with fifty-five men, no captures, and a fish story to the effect that the missing five had strayed away and would probably return by river. Thereupon, it seems, the lieutenant colonel commanding had taken personal charge; the same men, the same road, the same pueblo; had found the remains of the five missing, hacked to

pieces in the bamboo close to town; that he had thereupon called upon the *presidente* to surrender the assassins, the secreted arms, etc.; that the *presidente* called on the saints to witness that the perpetrators were not of this *pueblo*; that all his people were friendly and true; that they were poor and peace-loving, and had neither arms nor cartridges, etc., etc.; that the colonel had thereupon told the *presidente* that he lied, that he knew he lied, that he knew the perpetrators, knew that some were at that moment in the jabbering throng about the church, knew that abundant arms and ammunition were secreted somewhere within the walls, and finally that he would give him just five minutes in which to produce them. No use to try to escape. Besides the men at the colonel's back, were others occupying every road, pass, and trail leading to the outskirts and to the open country. The *presidente* persisted. The townspeople echoed the denial. Langham, watch in hand, listened, placid, but implacable. "Five minutes are up," said he, and nodded to an old-time sergeant, standing, as said a reluctant Irish witness, "handy by." The *presidente's* heels went suddenly from under him. The *presidente* lit on the broad of his back on the turf, and in the twinkling of an eye he was bound hand and foot. Then, without hurting him in the least, but holding him forcefully, certain experienced hands

secured him to stakes, produced a tin funnel and a bucket of fresh water. "Will you say—now?" asked the officiating sergeant. The *presidente's* nerve had not yet gone. He glared in wrath and hate, but held his tongue. The tube of the funnel went into his mouth; cool water into the bowl of the funnel, and the *presidente* had either to swallow or choke. It didn't hurt; it was simply inconvenient. Few men care to be made to drink when they do not wish to. One swallow led to another, and still the *presidente* held out. No one further touched or hurt him. The discomfort arose from having to absorb more water than the system had room for, even after swelling visibly. When finally he began to run over, the *presidente* was lifted to his feet and asked very civilly would he now point out the assassins, and the ammunition? For six months past, having been subjected to nothing but questions, he had successfully concealed both arms and the men through whose agency our people had been done to death. But this resurrection of an old Spanish method was far too persuasive. At first the *presidente* gurgled no. Then another pint was suggested. The *presidente* stood a few minutes' further application, then "threw up the sponge." He would name the culprit. He would point the way. Five minutes thereafter, from house after house, aye, even from the church, protesting, cringing

creatures were dragged to light—three commissioned officers among them. Then, within the massive walls, to consecrated ground the *presidente* led the searchers, and the little arsenal was found. A repetition of the process persuaded a neighboring *presidente* to like revelation; and after that it was never needed. The story went swiftly from town to town that at last the Americans were led by an officer who couldn't be fooled, and who carried a funnel. The mere exhibition of that suggestive implement told further *presidentes* what to expect. And so ended the triumphant defiance of Sámar and its modern Samaritans.

To no word of this did the accused officer before the court oppose objection. He stood quite ready to tell it all himself, if need be. No *presidente* had been more than temporarily inconvenienced. Both officials were quite well six hours after the "treatment"; but all this had been brought out by the evidence of two or three reluctant sergeants, who had acted under Langham's orders, and, primarily, through the enterprise of Lieutenant Crabbe, who, it seems, had questioned man after man in the district, and then "considered it a duty he owed the army and the nation to make it known." Asked why he had not reported it to the military authorities instead of giving it to the correspondents, Mr. Crabbe said he

feared the general was in sympathy with the lieutenant colonel, and would "pigeon-hole" the entire matter. He had, therefore, taken the most effective way.

Of everything else the court could only find the accused guiltless. Of the allegation that he subjected certain native officials to certain "torture" in order to elicit most important information, the court had no alternative but to find him guilty. Belden's plea was eloquent and forcible, but—orders are orders. No matter that our people, soldier or civilian, were shot from ambush, boloced in cold blood, trapped in pit-falls, flayed, flogged, and tortured to slow and cruel death; no matter that officials, sworn to loyalty, should give refuge to assassins, should conceal them, their arms, and their supplies—should laugh and lie in the face of the officers sent in search—the law and the prophets, the press and the pulpit held that only by the rules of civilized war should even savages be handled. It was a far cry from the Philippines to Philadelphia, from Balangiga to Boston. The blood of betrayed and butchered comrades had little of the Quaker strain at best, and who at home should care how men died when obeying the orders of an obnoxious administration? The few who clamored for the punishment of the successful officers clamored loud. The many who down in their hearts approved, were silent. The Gov-

ernment had heard nothing from the many and much from the few. Just as in the days of the Indian wars the good folk farthest removed from the scene were loudest in denunciation of the troops at the spot. To these latter it was death if they lost, and defamation if they won. The men who put an end to the most savage and intractable side of the insurrection were summoned in turn to take their punishment. The court being composed of soldiers, could only find in accordance with the facts and sentence according to law. But the men who so found and sentenced came forth from the council chamber, after sending their sealed verdict to the war office at home, and it was significant that member after member shook the hand of the accused officer, Colonel Langham, and "cut" Lieutenant Crabbe.

Then came six weeks of waiting—six weeks in which the recently accused had little to do but rest, recuperate, and await results. Corregidor, with its sea breezes, had been suggested by certain physicians, but James Gridley said go to.

The Beldens, all, were billeted in the fair suburb of Malate, and something more potent than sea breezes was bringing the light to Langham's eyes. Kitty Belden, who had never set foot near the court-room during the ten days' trial, was taking unaccountable interest in the

case, now that it was fairly closed, and Belden watched her with grave anxiety. Crabbe, who had called thrice, had not once been received. He had appealed to Mrs. Belden, who said she could not influence her daughter. He had gone so far as to beg that Belden should intercede, and got for answer the discomfiting assurance, and Belden looked him squarely in the eyes, that he would not influence his daughter if he could. Then Crabbe got a hint from headquarters to the effect that, the court being scattered, he should make himself scarce; that a boat would be leaving forthwith for the south, and, as Blake expressed it, "his company needed him if nobody needed his company." Except one officer specifically instructed, there was no one to see him off.

But the letters that were speedily coming by every transport from the States! Shafto was in a fury. Shafto demanded that, no matter what the issue, no matter what the sentence, his kinsman should quit instanter the service of a government that could so ignominiously treat so valiant and valuable an officer! Shafto was amazed to find so many of the clergy and the press against him, and turned in wrath unspeakable from the door of his favorite sanctuary after a pulpit reference to the case. Shafto bored immensely the graybeards of the Union, the Conservative, the Avenue, and other eminently respectable

clubs that had few connections and less concern in a campaign in the antipodes. To hear the scathing truth and to learn genuine public sentiment in the matter, one had to drop in at "The United Service," the armories, or the gatherings of soldier societies growing out of the wars.

And the result was fully foreshadowed, though to the last Langham persisted in the belief that a jury of his brother officers would not, in face of such overwhelming array of outrage on the part of the enemy, sentence him even to censure. He forgot that a military court is given no latitude; it must punish as prescribed by statute, not sentiment.

And the result was announced in just the way to hurt and humble him most. It was an exquisite evening on the Luneta. The band had been playing its best. The *paseo* was crowded with carriages and the broad walks with sauntering throngs. Arm in arm, Langham and Gridley came down toward the kiosk, lifting their white caps occasionally to ladies driving by. A number of low-hanging, open Victorias had been drawn up along the curb, each attracting its little knot of gallants in cool summer garb, and in one of these the friends caught sight of Mrs. and Miss Belden. Langham's eyes, indeed, had been looking for just one face, and found it here.

Perhaps it was because of this preoccupation he failed to note how very many men were regarding him curiously and with strange sympathy in their gaze—how many were the whispers passing from lip to lip. He had been urged to call at Belden's, to come and be at home and sure of welcome. The colonel himself had so assured him; but a sense of something—over-sensitiveness probably—had kept him away. Not until the case was finished, the finding, acquittal, conviction, sentence—whatever it might be—announced, would he accept invitation even to call. He and Gridley had driven out to ruined Guadalupe that afternoon, and, returning by Culi Culi and Pasay, had reached the Luneta late and without first going to their quarters, where at this moment, with sorrowing face, an aid-de-camp of the commanding general was nervously tramping up and down the gallery awaiting their return. Quitting their carriage opposite the south battery, the officers had walked but a short distance before coming upon the Belden carriage, and at sight of it Captain Gridley bethought him of a man he wished to speak to for a moment, and so, unwittingly, left Langham to his fate.

Two men were in conversation with Mrs. Belden, who, on the rear seat, next the curb, could not see the coming officers. Kitty—even while listening, apparently, to the

words poured into her ear—was sitting facing her mother and looking for him who now, raising his cap, bowed to both ladies, and as in duty bound, first addressed the elder. Yet in Kitty's anxious eyes he might have read some premonition, for there was trouble in every face in and around that little Victoria. There were scores of searching eyes, too, waiting now and watching on every side. For an instant, as he addressed her mother, Miss Belden believed that he must have heard—that he had purposely come forth that all might see how bravely he could bear this, too. But that hope vanished the instant he turned to her, and in that instant, in her eyes, he saw that the news had come, and that they knew it, these people, before him. Stryker, colonel of volunteers, but long of the old army, saw what Kitty Belden saw, and his lips signaled warning to Shannon, who was at her side. But it was to Shannon that, as Kitty Belden's trembling hand released itself, Langham turned. His face went very white and he strove to speak calmly, but he spoke in terms that told he would have no denial.

"It's come, I see. What is it, Shannon?"

Shannon's eyes flew to Stryker's and round the furtively glancing circle, but Langham's voice brought them sharply back to his. He shook loose, too, the hand that Stryker laid upon his arm.

"Out with it, man!" he demanded, and instinctively his left hand sought the carriage rail close by Kitty's side, though he faced his old friend and comrade and held him to his task.

"Langham, I can't——" began the poor fellow. "Let Gridley. He'll be here in——"

"Out with it *now*, Shannon! Is it——?"

"It's suspension," answered Shannon miserably, "and——reprimand."

One moment, in silence, Langham stood facing his old associate, his face still very white, his lips quivering a bit; his right hand, hanging by his side, closed and unclosed once or twice spasmodically; his left, twitching, still lay there on the carriage rail, close by Kitty's side. He began slowly turning to his right—away from her—until he could regain thorough self-command. Perhaps she thought him going without a word, without having heard a word of sympathy—that infinite sympathy that seemed to surge in every heart. Whatever the cause, it overcame all consideration of maidenly reserve, for with sudden movement she swayed toward him—to him, as though to arrest his going, and quick, light, unseen beneath the folds of her broad silken scarf, both her slender hands had seized—her left hand had stolen into—his; and Langham, incredulous, wondering, even in that moment

of intense chagrin, turned again for one sudden glance in her uplifted, swimming eyes, and in them read compensation for a thousand ills, and thanked his God such sorrow had not come in vain.

Not until some hours later were these two permitted speech with each other—and without supervision other than that of the Man in the Moon. It was past ten. Callers at the Gillettes' were less numerous than usual, nor did they long remain. Something was obviously uppermost in the minds of the receiving party. Even Mrs. Gillette did not, as usual, beseech her visitors to come out on the back gallery and see the beauty of the moonlit bay, with all the riding lights of the shipping, the signal lamps of the fleet, the reflected radiance of the myriad stars. Out over the placid waters the silvery tinkle of the ships' bells had tolled the hour of ten, when the sentry at the sea wall halted short, faced outward at the gate, and presented arms to something he had never seen before—an officer coming up the little flight of stone steps from the broad, weed-strewn beach. A tall officer, straight and slender, and one who moved none too briskly for his years, was this, but the sentry could account for languid action on part of many a man in uniform. What he could not account for was Colonel Langham's coming in the back way. Honest linesman that he was, Private

Rooney fixed his gaze on the far horizon as his salute was hurriedly acknowledged. Possibly the sympathy of his Celtic heart had gone out to the lately accused officer—Heaven knows it was general throughout the rank and file! Possibly Private Rooney, like the gallant Irishman he was, had affairs of his own in mind and would never spy on a fellow man. Certain it is that he stood rigidly at attention, all apparent inattention to what might be transpiring behind him, and Rooney never saw what we saw, the little white hand that trembled on the balcony rail above, while another white hand, cordial and clasping, met still another, extended by the new arrival, and led him within, and, without delay, aloft. The generalship of some generals' wives would be a valuable asset in some generals' noddles, were it only transferable. Not even Mrs. Belden was in view when Mrs. Gillette—Heaven's choicest blessings rain upon her!—led Langham to that seaward gallery and left him there. It was all her planning, for well she knew how hard it would be for him to have to run the gauntlet of dozens of sympathizers along the Calle Real. "Come by the Calle Marina—the beach," said she. "They'll all be going by ten o'clock, and I'll meet you."

Long as he may live Langham will never hear four bells sound without a thrill. Some belated mariners were

still tinkling, and in sweet, silvery cadence, the chime came floating over the hushed and waveless waters as he stepped forth into the shadowy veranda and looked eagerly about him. For a moment he saw nothing but the exquisite panorama of that moonlit bay, but that was not the vision he sought. Then, just then, came a faint sound, the rustle of a skirt a little to the right, and there, faintly, he discerned a tall, slender shape, all in filmy white.

There was no languor in his step now. Five quick strides brought him close. Then out went both his hands, searching. One moment they clasped two others that trembled very much but without a struggle for release. Then with a sudden impulse, for nothing articulate had been said, he let them go, only to throw both arms this time about the yielding form and hold it close-pressed to an exultant, throbbing heart. It was some minutes before he or she could speak coherently, or in more than monosyllables. It was nearer five bells than four when at last he could trust his voice with the question—he could only murmur it even then:

“They may refuse my resignation, but, just as soon as it is accepted, I shall go—home. Kitty, will—my wife go with me?”

For a little minute there was silence. Then she lifted

up her eyes and looked him full in his, with such depth of trust and love, mingled with sympathy for his soldier sorrow, and then, low and clear, came her answer, sealed one instant later by the first kiss of her pure lips:

“ I will go with you—anywhere.”

PART THREE

What Happened in Gotham

CHAPTER I

ANOTHER SOLDIER REWARDED.

WHEN you've had enough of fighting savages on scriptural principles, my boy, come home and 'tend to business," wrote Shafto before that sentence was announced. What Shafto said and wrote after seeing that sentence in cold type will not be here recorded. Langham's was not the only case that grew out of the campaign. Sooner or later other officers trod the path of humiliation, and later the homeward way, where, however, were sometimes scenes and greetings never contemplated by the framers of the Army Regulations. Some men whose lot was cast in the regular service had longer to bear the burden of official censure than did Langham, lately of the volunteers. As between a record for having done more and won more than any officer of his grade, and the possession of a title in common with dozens who had won nothing else, Langham probably got that which he would have chosen. Furthermore, he had won a reward and treasure beyond price that, but for his soldier sorrow, might have been wooed long months in vain. He was certainly the happiest-looking man aboard the *Teutonic* when, with that sweet young wife clinging to his arm, he gazed again upon the

uplifted torch of majestic Miss Liberty and the towering sky-scrappers of lower Gotham. They had journeyed leisurely through Japan, and lazily through tropic seas to India and on to Suez; had wandered through Italy and Switzerland, the Rhineland, and the north of France; had visited kinsfolk and charming country seats in the Shires of England, and now, after many moons—all honeymoons—following the final acceptance of his resignation, and that very pretty wedding in Manila, whereat Lieutenant Colonel Blake made one of his customary speeches and referred to our Minneconjou brothers-in-arms as seeking Minneconjou—gal relations, they were coming home to Shafto and the great city, and to a welcome little looked for—that of the comrade and knight of old, of Minneconjou days, for here with Shafto at the White Star pier stood James the Silent. Whatever could have brought that fervent campaigner so suddenly to New York?

In Paris they had read the news of Bullard's final dissolution, leaving what was left of his fortune to the widow. In the Shires they had heard that certain lawyers had appeared in the interests of a very interesting claimant—no less a claimant than a common-law wife, a very dashing, handsome creature, who had abundant evidence, documentary and otherwise, to prove her claims,

and such a pathetic, tear-starting tale to tell—all of a young, trusting heart, a guileless girl lured from home, friends, and fireside, tricked into a mock marriage, feted a few years at home and abroad, then basely, cruelly, shamefully, shamelessly deserted—just such a tale as the press loves to exploit and the law to linger over.

One of Langham's first inquiries was for Mrs. Bullard. She had rejoined her own kindred, said Shafto, was living on the Hudson and would soon be coming to town to call on Mrs. Langham. Captain Gridley, said Shafto, could really tell more than he could, as the captain had been twice to see her since his home-coming from Manila, and Gridley, it seems, had at last availed himself of the privilege of a long leave, and never, thought Langham, had his trooper comrade appeared to better advantage. Verily there was virtue in the tailor. Langham had always rather dreaded the coming together of Shafto and this far Western rough rider, but to Langham's secret joy, not unmixed with surprise, here stood his imperturbable friend garbed quite as appropriately as was Shafto himself—and Shafto was an authority.

And these were not the only ones of the old set at Minneconjou to welcome eagerly the returning voyagers. With delight in her eyes, Kitty greeted Mrs. Mack and her general the very evening of their arrival, and it was

delicious to see Mrs. Mack's easy acceptance of Shafto's civilities, and to listen to her tales of foreign travel. The Macks, too, had come home by way of Suez and had visited sections of Europe not comprised in the itinerary of the younger couple—Greece and Ireland in particular, which enabled the good lady to hold the floor unchallenged, though Shafto's face was a study when she gravely told her darling Kitty she'd missed the chance of her life in failing to see Athens and the Æsophagus by moonlight. Shafto could never quite assimilate American army ideas and methods, though he took to Gridley at the start, and found much to approve of in General Mack. It was the general's "lady," as Mrs. Mack preferred to be announced, that Shafto could not successfully interpret. "Is she a type of what one finds in the American service?" he asked his nephew. "Are Mrs. O'Dowd and The Campaigner types of your own?" was Langham's laughing answer. "If you're looking for types," he said, "look there," and his proud eyes turned to where his young wife stood at the curtained archway, bidding Gridley good-night. Shafto was a worshiper there even before that first gallop in the park. After that he would have made riding the one ceremony of the day had not professional objections presently interposed, on learning the nature of which Shafto ordered his horses into win-

ter quarters and walked about the premises as though on porcelain or pipestems.

Shafto had long approved of "Cousin Amy, shallow-hearted," especially after she so deftly set her cap for him, for in Amy's brilliant eyes what were the snows of December when combined with such abundant bank account? But Cousin Amy struck a false note when she sought to "patronize," if not even to "form," her cousin by the accident of marriage. "This charming bit of mountain heather," as she described her. Cousin Amy dwelt rather too pointedly upon Cous'n Pitt's former attachment and the possibilities of his again becoming fickle, and in the most innocently kittenish way in the world succeeded in saying the nastiest little things imaginable and leaving Kitty consumed with wrath until Langham came home from the office. "Pitt" told it all, with a whimsical grin, to Percy over their postprandial cigar that evening, and Percy, who had noted Kitty's flaming cheeks and eyes at dinner, felt that something had happened to vex her mightily, and blazed up and boiled over at the recital of Amy's "ways and means," to the end that all the blandishments of that hitherto successful coquette were lavished on him thereafter in vain. A busy man was Shafto. He had succeeded in running down and bringing to the bar of justice the man whose

villiany had wrecked so many modest homes and fortunes. He was a "bear" on the stock market when a boom seemed imminent. He was planning for Pitt's new house and taking all manner of men, no wiser than himself, into his confidence as to nursery accommodations. He was at war with the administration, while secretly admiring its vehement head and vigorous policy. He was, in fact, a man divided against himself when that charming widow, Mrs. Bullard, came to consult him in a business way about certain investments, and he was compelled to say to her that any investment would be injudicious until the courts had disposed of the mysterious claimant against her late husband's estate. "If she come into court and swear to the truth of her statements and bring witnesses to prove the open existence of her relations with Mr. Bullard while abroad, I don't see," said Mr. Shafto, "how the court can possibly put her aside."

It was at this stage of the proceedings that Captain Jim Gridley, hearing through Langham of Shafto's dictum, broke silence at last with just these three words:

"But I do."

This was late in November, and a peculiarity of the case thus far was the fact that the fair claimant referred to had been kept beyond the reach of what her lawyers termed "possibly adverse influences," Shafto, who al-

ways referred to the firm as "solicitors," had never encountered them in any way. All he knew of them and all he could tell Gridley and Langham when successively they arrived upon the scene, was that men on the Street referred to them as "energetic and aggressive" in their profession—lawyers of the Dodson & Fogg variety, he presumed. In her desire to avert publicity, to remain in retirement and hear no more of the scandal attaching to her late husband's name, Mrs. Bullard, it seems, had besought her brother—himself a young beginner at the law—to settle with the claimant's attorneys and have done with it, even though it left her with a mere pittance. But he had enlisted the interest and sympathies of certain elders of the profession who, while not at first appearing in the case, were yet keeping watch over it if for no other reason than that the "aggressive" firm referred to would equally bear watching. The demands of the claimant were pronounced by her attorneys "as no more than her rights," but by everybody else as extortionate and impossible. It was believed that if she herself could be found and reasoned with, a settlement far more equitable could be effected, but this her attorneys were evidently determined to prevent. She could only be heard of through them. She would appear in court at the proper time to demand recognition of her full rights. "Mean-

while," said these legal gentry, "she has placed herself and her case unreservedly in our hands, and we shall proceed to extremities unless her just and moderate demands, in view of all she has suffered, are promptly and fully complied with." Mrs. Bullard had tearfully pleaded with her brother and his older advisers to yield and save her the anguish of having it all dragged to light and gloated over by the public. "The longer you delay," said the claimant's attorneys, "the more it shall cost you—in more ways than one." It was the talk at two clubs that settlement was to be made on the claimant's own terms, when Shafto got that singular wire from San Francisco:

Just arrived. Tell Mrs. Bullard's attorneys to refuse settlement. Reach New York next week.

GRIDLEY.

They had refused accordingly, and looked to Gridley to explain, and Gridley, when he came, declined to explain until he had time to "look about a bit." "You will see," said he, "they will be in no hurry to bring it to trial. What they hoped was to force a settlement out of court." And now, having looked about a bit as he said, and after some lively comings and goings, and when Shafto had sadly made known to Mrs. Bullard that he did not see how the court could possibly put aside the claims of her alleged predecessor, Captain Gridley had dropped in

most conveniently with his brief announcement, "But I do."

And he did. Acting under his advice, Mrs. Bullard's attorneys, now thoroughly aroused, scouted every claim and dared their opponents to produce the claimant and her case. It presently dawned on these astute practitioners that some strange reinforcement had come to the adversary, and for the life of them they couldn't tell what. Subsequent offers of settlement, at half the original rate, being likewise rejected, it finally resulted that the case was set for trial, and a grand sensation for the press and the public, a savory piece of scandal, was promised for the morrow; and then at the last moment the whole dainty dish was dumped into the fire. The "aggressive" practitioners and the eager reporters were left mystified and discomfited. A dramatic scene or story was utterly spoiled by the cold-blooded, calculating, consummate effrontery of a comparative stranger to courts of any kind—a cavalry captain from the far Philippines, James Gridley by name, and this is how it happened:

The case was set for a Wednesday morning, and a crowded court was looked for. At nine o'clock on Tuesday evening three men walked quietly into the main entrance of a very quiet up-town hotel. One of the three stepped to the desk; showed a telegram to the clerk on

duty, who glanced up with quick interest in his eyes, looked at the clock and pointed with his pen to a corridor leading to the ladies' entrance. Silently the three disappeared beyond the curtained archway, and presently stood opposite the elevator and under the full glare of the electric lights, uncovering as a little party came forth from the restaurant, passed them laughingly by, and went aloft in the noiseless car. This left them for a moment alone; the first of their number, tall, stern-featured, square-jawed, and, but for his heavy mustache, clean-shaven; the second, bearded and bronzed, a clear case of far Westerner in garb and bearing; the third a wiry, keen-eyed fellow (the one who had stepped to the desk), now keeping rather in the background. At them the bell-buttoned door-boy looked with certain resentment—"Gentlemen unaccompanied by ladies," being expected to confine themselves to the main entrance, lobby, and office. The boy stared with keener interest, when, a moment later, with much clatter of hoofs, a carriage drew up under the *porte cochère*. The three came quickly forward as he threw open the door, and a side-whiskered, eye-glassed, angular man came up the steps with a singularly handsome woman, in deep mourning, leaning lightly upon his arm. These two entered the brilliant hallway, and instantly the tall, stern-featured man, pale,

and with lips close compressed, stepped forward and, confronting the woman without a word, once more lifted his hat. One glance into that face she gave, then with an awful horror in her eyes, with a gurgling cry on her lips, dropped as though shot dead, and lay in a senseless heap upon the rug.

“What does this mean?” gasped the spectacled man.
“This lady is my friend—my client.”

“This lady, sir,” was the icy answer, “is my wife.”

Reporters stormed in vain that night. The house physician forbade their entrance to the rooms reserved by Messrs. Lyon & Spotts for their client, known to them and to law, said they, as Mrs. Amos Bullard—the other lady of that name being, as they claimed, an unauthorized edition. But the legal practitioner present relinquished the case, *nolens volens*, to the medical, and was further advised by certified minions of the law in attendance, to-wit, Police Detective Corrigan of Mulberry Street, and Sheriff Blossom, formerly of Omaha and Cheyenne, later of Silver Hill, S. D., that the fair client and claimant had no right whatever to the name he had given as hers—there being a “priory attachment” in favor of one James Gridley Barron, a citizen of California in the eighties, but later known as Private, Corporal, Sergeant, Lieutenant, and Captain James Gridley,

—th Regiment of Cavalry, U. S. A. Mr. Lyon retired for the night and subsequently from the case, but the doctors were longer on duty.

And this was Jim Gridley's sorrowful story, told later to Langham, Shafto, and to the attorneys retained in behalf of the legal Mrs. Bullard—four men who listened in silence and in sympathy, then wrung his hand at its close. Born and bred in the army, only son of an officer of artillery, some of his earliest recollections were of Sitka and Wrangell, and the ice floes of Alaska. His mother, whom he deeply loved, had died when he was only twelve. His father, who had deeply loved her, brooded long over her loss, but saved and stinted then and long thereafter, with the view and hope that their boy might be educated as a gentleman. The lad's own wish had been for West Point, but it had never been his mother's. An expensive private school and then the University was the programme, and he had studied fairly, and all might have gone well had he not, when just twenty-one, fallen deplorably in love with a very beautiful girl whose home was in Sacramento. His father, now aging, had investigated as to her family and associates, and gravely disapproved. Infatuated, the son had married against his father's wish, and yet the father had forgiven, and tried hard to like his daughter-in-law, but

retired presently from active service, and then the trouble began.

Of low extraction, yet gifted with beauty and strange power of fascination, the girl's ambition was to shine in society or on the stage. She had expected to be welcomed and fêted at the Presidio, but found that denied her. They could not afford to live in San Francisco. Her young husband was almost dependent upon his father, who built them a little home and came to live with them, but, sorrowing deeply, happily died in time. His entire fortune, a few thousands, he left to his boy; and she fretted, complained, and insisted they should move to the city. The baby born to them she rebelled against and neglected. Life with her became a burden, yet he loved, and so sought to earn the means to indulge her whims. A great opportunity opened in Alaska. Friends of his father's were interested in the enterprise. She could not go to so bleak and miserable a place. It would kill their child, she said, if it didn't kill her. He left the little home and his little nest-egg of a fortune in her hands, and went hopefully, prayerfully his way to the frozen north. In two months, having her infrequent letters posted in Sacramento, she had left her little one with her people and moved to San Francisco, as she said, "to study dramatic art." She lived in style at the Grand;

went home less and less frequently ; spent lavishly, speculated, and in a few months ran through their entire fortune. The little one died, thank God for that ! The mother sold the modest home ; returned to the city as a dashing widow in becoming mourning ; soon found it necessary to receive other support, and a Nevada mining magnate stood ready. There was a stir and scandal at the hotel ; a request for both to leave ; and young Barron, summoned back by warning letters that had been long months finding, and many weeks bringing him, returned to find home, fortune, child, wife, and honor—all gone. So far as he was concerned, they knew the rest. Enlisting as James Gridley, his mother's father's name, he won his way ; and as soon as act of Congress could amend his record, he would resume his own. The past had been buried, so far as he was concerned, until in Amos Bullard's beautiful wife at Silver Hill he had found a woman wronged and in peril, and in Amos Bullard's assailant he felt confident he should find, some day, the woman who had tricked and dishonored him ; had gone from bad to worse, had become a wanton, a swindler, and adventuress.

For a time she had vanished, but, as foreshadowed, came forward with her impudent claim so soon as the broken old man was called to his final account. An

agent, long since employed, had sent him by cable the single word, "Come." At San Francisco full details met him. At New York he put the detectives on Lyon & Spotts, and located her in a neighboring city. He let her lawyers bring her to the metropolis that there, unwittingly, they might deliver her into the hands of the man she most had wronged. It rested with him now to deliver her into the hands of the law. In this the attending physician told him he would better be deliberate. Mrs. James G. Barron was a stricken woman, but—Mrs. Amos Bullard's name and fortune were safe.

Another summer was come. The new regiments of the new army, enlarged and reorganized, had gone to Manila. The old regiments had come home. The 2—th, in which Langham had spent his Minneconjou days, was rejoicing in its stations on Champlain and the sparkling Bay. Colonel and Mrs. Belden, "grandpa and grandma" now, had been having blissful days with Kit and Pitt and "Precious," officially known as William Pitt Berkely Langham, Second. Mrs. Sparker had called at the charming new home away up near Central Park. Mrs. Crabbe, a recent acquisition, had not. "Cousin Amy, shallow-hearted," had flitted to England for the summer, leaving Shafto still hovering about Manhattan, awaiting for the exodus of Kit, King Baby, and

"my nephew, Colonel Langham," to the Adirondacks. Mrs. Bullard was contemplating, so it was said, a sojourn at the sea-shore, despite Kitty Langham's earnest "bid" to come and bide a while with them in their bark lodge in the Wilderness, when the plans of all our immediate circle met temporary check by the coming of a missive that might have been foreseen.

FORT GRANT, A. T., June —, 19—.

DEAR LANGHAM:

Poor old "Grid" is free at last. You know he brought that fair incumbrance out to Mesilla, as advised by the doctors. It was the only way to prolong her life; but he saw and she saw the end was coming, and—well, you know Mrs. Blake was always commanding officer, not I. At her suggestion they brought the dying woman to Curtin's Ranch near us and nursed and did what they could, but Jim—left last night with the mortal remains for Sacramento, and Nan nearly cried her eyes out bidding him good-by. She says he's the one man she knows that deserves to be an angel—or marry one. He was too much broken up to write and asked me to do so for him.

My salutations to the Heroine of the *'Manuensis*, likewise to the *Princeling*. She made just the wife for one of the best fellows and soldiers I know. "Are there any more at home like—her?" If so—but here my wife reads, interposes, deposes, and says—and pulls my ear as she says it—that the undersigned is a silly old gabbler.

Yours confidentially,

GERALD BLAKE,

Colonel — Cavalry.

"I wonder," said Kitty, as she read this over a second time, "I wonder——"

"Well, what?" said her expectant spouse.

"If—well—*what* Captain Gridley ever did with the handkerchief—you know, the one he picked up at the cottonwoods," and then the heroine of the '*Manuensis*' bent to seize and snuggle the lusty little son and heir, for Langham was regarding her fixedly.

"Katherine Belden," said he, slowly, mischievously, "I begin—to believe—you are still—just a wee bit——"

"I'm not," said Kitty promptly.

.

Nor has she yet had reason to be, but then, as dear Amy says, he is still young and impressionable, and the novelty hasn't worn off as has some of the bloom. At all events it cannot well be on Mrs. Bullard's account, for now, three years later, though Fox, Gordon, and Champion have long since reappeared, and the little lady of Minneconjou days and her colonel ride daily and delightedly, there comes no rival on Roscoe from Silver Hill or elsewhere. The handkerchief picked up at the cottonwoods has found its way back to the original owner, and that fair owner to the cottonwoods (though not those of the Minneconjou), for James the Silent came and spoke to some purpose, and the long missives received by the

Langhams from the far frontier, full of such womanly tenderness and pride and love, are in the hand that penned the superscription of the letter Kitty Belden capsized at the Manila Hospital—the letter that seemed to burn her pretty fingers then. The letters that are so eagerly, joyously welcomed now—are signed Eleanor Barron.

FINIS

A KNIGHT *of* COLUMBIA

By GENERAL CHARLES KING

A Story of the Civil War

ILLUSTRATIONS BY GEORGE GIBBS

SOME PRESS NOTES

The World, New York City

The chapters form a vivid series in adventure and love.

The Mail and Express, New York City

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The Minneapolis Times

Ladies in white gowns beruffled and ribbon-zoned. Roses in the hair, swords at the side. Up my men and gallop fast! A last look at the gate where she stands. A last flutter of a white kerchief. Then the battle, the skirmish, the treachery. This is the atmosphere through which this Knight of Columbia passes from the commencement platform to the battle of Five Forks.

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